

Pesantren As An Ecosystem Of Religious Moderation: Tradition, Authority, And Social Transformation

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ABSTRACT

Pesantren are indigenous Indonesian Islamic educational institutions that function not only as spaces for the transmission of religious knowledge but also as arenas for the reproduction of tradition, the formation of religious authority, and the articulation of social change. Amid increasing religious complexity, social polarization, and the growing penetration of modernity and digital technology, pesantren face the challenge of maintaining continuity with their traditions while developing moderate and responsive religious practices. This study aims to analyze pesantren as ecosystems of religious moderation by examining the interrelationship between Islamic scholarly traditions, kiai authority, educational processes, and social transformation. The study employs a qualitative approach using library research and content analysis of academic literature on pesantren, religious moderation, religious authority, and social transformation. The findings indicate that religious moderation in pesantren does not develop linearly or solely through formal curricula; rather, it emerges through an ecosystem that integrates the study of classical Islamic texts, kiai role modeling, pesantren culture, practices of tolerance, cultural literacy, and social engagement. Tradition functions as a foundation for the legitimation of values, kiai authority serves as a pedagogical and moral mechanism, while social transformation provides a space for actualizing the values of moderation in community life. Theoretically, this study contributes to conceptualizing pesantren as dynamic, dialogical, and transformative ecosystems of religious moderation. Practically, it provides a framework for strengthening moderation education through locally rooted traditions, adaptive religious authority, and social empowerment.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The increasingly intensive social changes in contemporary society have created a new configuration of religiosity characterized by widespread access to information, globalization, and social mobility and digital technology. This phenomenon has expanded religious discourse to allow for a broader and more inclusive religious dialogue, but at the same time has triggered the fragmentation of authority, polarization of identity, and the spread of exclusive and sometimes

extreme religious narratives. In the climate of a pluralistic society, various moderations emerge as an epistemological-praxis need to maintain commitment to religious teachings while respecting socio-cultural and religious diversity. Dependence on religious authority is no longer limited to formal educational institutions and scholars, but also through digital media that accelerate the production and distribution of religious knowledge without rigorous scientific verification. This context demands Islamic education that not only transmits doctrines, but also shapes the ethical disposition, dialogical capacity, and social skills of students, so that moderation becomes a relevant framework for building a tolerant, contextual, and globally civilized religious diversity (Kuswana & Pauzian, 2023).

In Indonesia, pesantren occupy a strategic position as an institution with strong historical, cultural, and social roots, functioning not only as a place for the transmission of Islamic knowledge, but also as a space for character formation, internalization of values, and the development of social relations between kiai, students, alumni, and the surrounding community. Contemporary research shows that moderation in pesantren is produced through curriculum, learning practices, religious activities, kiai examples, and communal life that allow the practice of tolerance and appreciation of real differences. Thoriquattyas and Hanun emphasized that moderation in pesantren is dynamic, flexible, and multidimensional because it is articulated through learning processes and extracurricular activities, while the study of traditional literature on Sunan Kudus shows the role of local Islamic traditions as the basis for religious literacy and peaceful social relations. In the context of globalization, these changes are also influenced by the dynamics of pesantren-based education that not only prioritizes transmission, but also the capacity to form a democratic, inclusive, and digital literacy ethos that strengthens moderate and dialogical learning in the midst of cultural diversity and identity (Suradi et al., 2021). The role of Islamic educational policies and institutions, including madrasah diniyah, MA PTKIN, and digital innovation in pesantren, is increasingly prominent as a mechanism to maintain a moderate orientation that is integrated with people's lives as well as preventive efforts against radicalization through a curriculum that emphasizes wasatiyyah, pluralism, and interreligious dialogue (Maarif et al., 2023).

The understanding of pesantren as an institution of religious moderation is not enough limited to curriculum material alone, because moderation is actually produced through a network of social mechanisms that involve power relations, scientific authority, institutional culture, daily habits, kiai examples, and the involvement of the pesantren community in people's lives. The authority of kiai is not only symbolically epistemic, but also functions as a framework for the interpretation, internalization of values, and the religious identity of students formed through pedagogical practices and the dynamics of communal interaction. In reality, tradition provides the foundation for legitimacy and continuity of values, but the authority of kiai interprets, transmits, and contextualizes these values to respond to the challenges of the times. Therefore, the relationship between tradition and authority needs to be read dialectically: tradition provides a normative foundation, while the practice of kiai leadership, as well as the dynamics of social interaction between pesantren and the wider community, produce experiences as social realities that can be observed through rituals, discussions, and daily practices (Rasyid et al., 2024).

Although studies on pesantren and religious moderation have developed, there is still a significant conceptualization gap if moderation is understood as an ecosystem that integrates traditions, authority, education, and social transformation simultaneously. Many previous studies have emphasized one dimension such as kiai leadership, curriculum, or internalization of values without describing how these components interact in a structured ecosystem that influences each other to produce religious moderation in a plural context. Exchange research shows that kiai authority plays a role in shaping the interpretive orientation of students, while pedagogical practices and communal life make tolerance a social experience. This gap is an important starting point for understanding how the relationship of power, tradition, education, and social change work synergistically in the production of religious moderation in Islamic boarding schools, including how the dynamics of digitality and interaction with local residents modulate the horizon of religious interpretation (Dewi et al., 2023).

The ecosystem perspective provides a more comprehensive conceptual framework to understand pesantren as an epistemic, pedagogical, cultural, and social space simultaneously. Religious

moderation, in this framework, is not seen as an additional program embedded in the pesantren education system, but rather the result of a continuous interaction between Islamic sources of knowledge, interpretive authority, teaching practices, institutional culture, and the involvement of pesantren in the dynamics of society. The authority of kiai remains epistemic and moral compass for the formation of the horizon of religious interpretation of students, but pedagogical practices, institutional culture, and community interactions normalize tolerance as a social experience manifested through rituals, discussions, and daily practices. In the dialectic between tradition and authority, tradition provides legitimacy and continuity of values, while kiai authority interprets and contextualizes these values to respond to the demands of the times, so that religious moderation emerges as a dynamic generated through the integration of *wasatiyyah*, integrative frequencies, exemplary examples, and adaptation to digital currents rather than simply a response to the longing for the stability of religious organizations (Kuswana & Pauzian, 2023).

The current global context confirms that plurality and digital dynamics require the study of pesantren transformation to be seen as a social laboratory where the integration of traditions, technology, and social transformation can strengthen tolerance, commitment to friendship, and respect for local culture. Exchange studies show that pesantren ecosystems allow the production of moderation through mechanisms such as *wasatiyyah* internalized in the curriculum, the role of kiai exemplars, and community interaction with local residents and digital media, so that pesantren have the potential to become agents of intercultural and inter-religious dialogue. However, research space still exists in understanding how these components work synergistically as an ecosystem that influences each other, especially in the context of digital transformation, national-local curriculum integration, and power dynamics at the institutional and societal levels (Maarif et al., 2023).

An ecosystem framework that combines epistemic, pedagogical, cultural, and social dimensions offers a more dynamic understanding of pesantren as a space for religious moderation. Moderation is no longer positioned as an additional program, but rather the result of continuous interaction between scientific traditions, kiai interpretive authority, educational practices, institutional culture, and social relations with the surrounding community as well as the dynamics of digital media that modulate the horizons of students' religious interpretation. Kiai authority remains a source of legitimacy and ethical direction, but conducting pedagogical practices, community rituals, and institutional cultural activations allows tolerance to be actualized as a real social experience, not just an abstract norm. This transformation is reflected in how epistemic traditions are reread through contemporary needs, where *wasatiyyah*, integrative curriculum, kiai examples, and the application of digital media complement each other in producing moderation in tandem with social change (Kuswana & Pauzian, 2023).

Research that adopts ecosystems as an analytical framework advances the understanding of religious moderation from a mere value entity to a production process involving power, learning practices, and interaction with the wider community. Thus, the transformation of pesantren education does not mark the elimination of traditions, but rather the enrichment of the capacity of tradition to dialogue with plural reality. This ecosystem concept opens up further research opportunities to explore how the digital dimension, national-local curriculum integration, and institutional dynamics contribute to religious literacy, inclusive leadership, and cross-identity dialogue. In practice, this framework can be the basis for pesantren curriculum design policies that mainstream media literacy, democratize student participation, and strengthen pesantren relationships with communities ethically and responsibly in the digital era; All of this still maintains the roots of the scientific tradition of pesantren as the foundation of moderation legitimacy (Mala & Hunaida, 2023).

2. METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach with a library research design to analyze pesantren as an ecosystem of religious moderation through the interaction between traditions, religious authorities, education, and social transformation. Data sources include scientific journal articles, academic books, previous research, policy documents, and Islamic literature that are purposively selected based on relevance, credibility, novelty, and suitability with the research focus. Data collection is carried out through searching, selection, and documentation of literature, while data analysis uses content analysis through the stages of source identification, critical reading, information extraction, coding,

categorization based on the dimensions of tradition, authority, and social transformation, as well as conceptual synthesis. The validity of the analysis is maintained through triangulation of sources, reflective interpretation, and consideration of the diversity of pesantren typologies. This method aims to produce an integrative conceptual understanding of the role of pesantren in maintaining Islamic traditions, forming religious authority, and actualizing the values of religious moderation in a dynamic, adaptive, and transformative manner.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. RESULTS

3.1.1 Religious Moderation as a Conceptual Framework

Religious moderation as a religious paradigm that emphasizes balance, justice, tolerance, respect for differences, and rejection of violence as the main principles of socio-religious life. This narrative is not only normative, but also praxis because diverse moderation requires a textual interpretation of society that is proportionate to justice, justice, and social reality in the plural. In the context of Islamic education, moderation is not enough to be reduced to a collection of normative concepts in the formal curriculum; it needs to be internalized through the educational ecosystem as a whole of educator-student relationships, institutional culture, religious practices, learning methodologies, and social experiences that enrich community identity. A number of preliminary studies show that pesantren play a role as a means of internalizing moderation through integration curriculum, kiai examples, communal interactions, daily life habits, and social involvement; systematic study of Erihadiana et al. Highlighting pesantren as an epistemic, pedagogical, and socio-cultural ecosystem that facilitates the process of internalizing moderation (Gunawan & Mariyam, 2022). This emphasis is in line with the view that moderation is both normative and praxis because it depends on how religious texts are formed, how communities are built, how interactions between groups take place, and how policy positions are taken in people's lives (Aliman & Issa, 2025).

In the context of social pluralism, the literature shows that religious moderation can function as a bridge between religious traditions and the needs of democracy and human rights. A search of contemporary studies shows the role of large religious organizations such as Nahdlatul Ulama in promoting peace, tolerance, and inter-group dialogue through digital initiatives and interreligious activities, which reflects the dynamics of moderation as a public praxis in the digital and globalization era (NU, Humanitarian Islamic initiative; promotion of interfaith dialogue) (Setia & Rahim, 2024). Studies on pesantren as agents of interfaith harmony affirm the potential of the pesantren ecosystem (human capital, social capital, intellectual capital) to strengthen moderation through social practices, religious literacy, and interreligious interaction, so that pesantren function as a medium of socio-cultural transformation in the democratization of religious life (Gunawan & Mariyam, 2022). Differing views on the effectiveness of moderation policies at the institutional and community levels show that the implementation of moderation still depends on local contexts, power dynamics, and educational cultures that build inclusive social bonds among various religious groups (Jafree et al., 2026). Within this framework, recent studies emphasize the need for an interdisciplinary approach that combines pluralism theory, moderation ethics, and inclusive educational practices to ensure the continuity of social harmony in Indonesia and other Muslim countries at the international level (Hutabarat, 2023).

The stressful conceptual framework from the teaching of moderation to moderation of life highlights that religious moderation must be lived and practiced in the daily practices of the pesantren community. In this framework, the effectiveness of pesantren is not only determined by the learning materials alone, but also by the ability of institutions that connect religious knowledge with character formation, social relationships, and community involvement in a sustainable manner. Contemporary findings show that pesantren function as an epistemic and praxis ecosystem that allows moderation to be internalized through institutional culture, worship habits, and intergroup interactions, so that moderation becomes part of society's social identity and ethics, not just a theoretical teaching (Yusuf et al., 2024). Studies of pesantren campuses and madrassas based on pesantren conclude that the internalization of moderation occurs through integration with daily religious practices, as well as through the involvement of students' families, surrounding environments, and social experiences that shape internal policy norms and responses to the dynamics of social plurality at the local and national

levels (Mulyana et al., 2023). More broadly, the literature shows that moderation as a public praxis needs to be presented through education that connects civilization theory with the practice of interreligious dialogue, religious literacy, and citizen cultural participation, so that religious moderation becomes an ethical framework for maintaining social peace in a pluralistic society (Rahmawati & Haryanto, 2022).

In the context of Islamic boarding schools, the shift to moderation also demands evaluation towards criticism of how educator-student relationships, institutional norms, and religious practices form an inclusive and tolerant community identity. Recent research highlights that pesantren are able to foster moderate character through habituation methods, integrated curriculum, and active involvement of students in interfaith and local community activities, so that religious moderation becomes the foundation for the formation of intellectual elites and community leaders who are able to reduce conflict and increase social cohesion in the digital era and globalization (Rohyati, 2023). The debate on the effectiveness of moderation policies at the institutional level emphasizes that the local context, power dynamics, and educational culture that are pressured by interreligious dialogue and cross-community cooperation determine the extent to which moderation can become a praxis norm in the pesantren environment and the nation as a whole (Ula & Shihabbuddin, 2024). In general, the latest literature suggests an interdisciplinary approach that combines pluralism theory, moderation ethics, and inclusive educational practices to ensure the sustainability of social harmony in Indonesia and other Muslim countries at the international level, with pesantren as a key player in socio-cultural transformation through the internalization of moderation as a basic value of community life (Mogra, 2022).

3.1.2. Pesantren as an Educational Institution and Social Ecosystem

Pesantren functions as an ecosystem that transforms religious moderation into a living practice (moderation lived) through the integration of traditions, kiai authority, curriculum, and social interaction, so that moderation is not only a theoretical teaching but a habit that students live in their daily lives. The ecosystem approach emphasizes that moderation is born from the interaction of three main elements: tradition as a framework of identity values, kiai authority as a provider of legitimacy and interpretation, and social transformation that actualizes these values in community life. Recent research shows that the internalization of moderation in pesantren is guided by a curriculum model that is integrated with religious practices, rituals, customs, and institutional culture that allows students to develop the capacity for dialogue, tolerance, and cross-group cooperation contextually and locally (Tamaki et al., 2021). At the national and international levels, recent studies emphasize the importance of grounding moderation through a combination of pluralism theory, moderation ethics, and inclusive educational practices that invest in the pesantren education ecosystem as an agent of socio-cultural transformation in the digital era and globalization (Maulana & Aziz, 2023).

Furthermore, the ecosystem framework reminds that there is no assumption of pesantren homogeneity; variations in educational orientation, scientific traditions, leadership patterns, social networks, and levels of openness to change need to be mapped to understand how moderation can become a praxis norm or remain contextual. The three main elements of tradition, kiai authority, and social transformation are not separate analyses, but interrelated in daily practice; social transformation of appearance how moderation values are relocated into practices of interreligious interaction, religious literacy, and citizen participation. The debate on the effectiveness of moderation policies at the institutional level shows that the local context, power dynamics, and educational culture that are pressured by interfaith dialogue and cross-community cooperation greatly determine the extent to which moderation can become an ethical framework and practice in Islamic boarding schools and other Islamic educational institutions (Nisak & Mubarak, 2024). Contemporary research also highlights the role of pesantren as agents of moderation through character formation (*habitus tawassuth, tawazun, tasamuh*), kiai-santri interaction, and the integration of moderation values in curriculum and daily practices that are intertwined with the formation of community identity and social cohesion at the local and national levels (Chotimah et al., 2022).

3.1.3 Pesantren Tradition as an Epistemic and Cultural Basis

The tradition of pesantren is a dynamic foundation for the continuity of Islamic education in Indonesia. The tradition of pesantren is not just a historical heritage, but an epistemic source that shapes the identity, morality, and religious orientation of students. In this framework, the transmission of Islamic knowledge, the teaching of the yellow book, respect for scientific sanad, as well as the practice of worship, morals, collective life, and social values become comprehensive blocks that are interrelated and continue to be reconstructed through negotiations with contemporary social and educational contexts. Ubaidillah highlights the need for epistemological reconstruction and institutional transformation to integrate traditional wisdom with the needs of modern education without losing the cultural identity of the pesantren. In the perspective of religious moderation, tradition serves as a cultural reservoir that provides a source of value to form tolerant, balanced, and contextual attitudes; The diversity of scholars' views in the scientific tradition of Islamic boarding schools can be used as a pedagogical foundation to develop openness to differences, so that tradition is interpreted as a relevant epistemic resource to answer contemporary problems (Irsyady et al., 2023).

However, a number of studies state that traditional adaptation does not automatically mean maintaining all old forms statistically. Pesantren demonstrate adaptive capacity through curriculum updates, the involvement of the yellow book in a more flexible format, and integration with the sophistication of formal education without changing the core of its cultural identity. For example, the dynamics of kiai leadership and the process of synchronizing the synchronization of pesantren after the 2019 pesantren law regulation show how this institution still adheres to the tradition of the yellow book while opening up opportunities for more modern formal education and institutional governance (Sabila et al., 2024). Furthermore, the discourse on religious moderation shows that the scientific tradition of pesantren that introduces the diversity of scholarly views can be a pedagogical basis for openness to differences, while maintaining traditional moral ethical values in the environment of students and their dai-daiahs (Mutaqin et al., 2024).

3.1.4. Kiai Authority in the Formation of Religious Moderation

The authority of the kiai as interpreted in the pesantren tradition is a fundamental dimension that does not solely describe teaching skills, but also the moralist and institutional roles that form the dialectic between Islamic teachings and the social context. In this framework, the kiai functions as a moral leader, interpreter of religious texts, role models, mediators between religious values and social reality, and directs institutional policies. The mechanism of this authority is reflected in three main dimensions: epistemic, pedagogical, and moral-social. Epistemic authority allows the kiai to interpret religious texts and traditions in a way that is relevant to the context of students, so that moderation can grow through an inclusive tradition of interpretation but still revoked from authoritative sources (Hannan, 2022). Pedagogical authority is learned through learning, habituation, and learning practices that instill moderation values through methodology, teaching methodology, and examples of daily behavior of kiai in interactions with students and the community around the pesantren (HS et al., 2022). Moral-social authority highlights the personal example of kiai and its involvement in social life as a medium for forming student identities towards a tolerant attitude towards the diversity of religious information accessed by students in the digital era, so that kiai leadership is no longer singular but also dialogical and adaptive to the social context (Surur & Muzanni, 2023). In the framework of moderation, the literature shows that the kiai leadership strategy strengthens moderation through the strengthening of religious traditions, the selection of educators, a moderate curriculum, and leadership examples based on epistemic interaction and moral-social examples (B. Soleh & Hasanah, 2021). These three contribute to the formation of a student identity that is balanced between loyalty to Islamic teachings and the ability to get along constructively with differences, as well as the ability to filter religious information spread outside the pesantren a relevant dynamic in the era of digital transformation of religious information (Syarif & Hannan, 2022). However, this narrative also emphasizes that the authority of the kiai is not a statistical entity; social change, globalization, and widespread access to religious resources outside Islamic boarding schools position these authorities as a space for dialogue, epistemic orientation, and guidance in pluralistic religious reasoning (Prastyo & Inayati, 2022).

In the context of diversity and social capital of Islamic boarding schools, the role of kiai as an agent of socialization of student identity attracts attention because it can form a pattern of religious

identity that maintains a commitment to Islamic teachings while fostering tolerance for differences. Research by several researchers shows that the autonomy of the kiai in choosing religious traditions, curriculum, and leadership examples can strengthen moderation through strengthening religious traditions, educator selection, and a moderate curriculum, while maintaining a balance between local values and universal Islamic values embraced by NU and other moderate religious organizations (Hannan, 2022). The change in the configuration of authority due to the digitalization of religion requires the kiai to no longer operate as the sole controller of knowledge, but rather as a leader who is able to establish an epistemic dialogue with students, guide them to navigate religious sources of religious information, and at the same time direct students to religious practices that include and open a plurality of religious identities in local and national communities (Surur & Muzanni, 2023). Cumulatively, the literature shows that kiai authority needs to be understood as a dynamic ecosystem that combines the ability of theological interpretation, reflective teaching, moral exemplarship, and the capacity to frame the religious information accessed by students, especially in the digital information era that increases access to non-pesantren religious texts and challenges to the cohesion of students' religious identity (HS et al., 2022).

3.1.5. Social Transformation as a Dimension of Moderation Actualization

Social transformation in the pesantren environment is a dynamic process that changes the pattern of relationships, social structure, value orientation, and community capacity as a result of educational practices and social interactions. Religious values instilled through curriculum, yellow book studies, and students' religious practices are then manifested in social actions such as community service, economic empowerment, education, da'wah, and strengthening social cohesion, so that religious moderation becomes an integrative result between religious teachings and the local social context. Within this framework, curriculum changes, education management, learning methodologies, and student participation serve as the main instruments to form inclusive religious organizations, as shown by works that emphasize the relationship between the transformation of pesantren education and the commitment to friendship, tolerance, nonviolence, and respect for local culture (Prastyo & Inayati, 2022). Furthermore, the study of Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor highlights how participation, discussion, communication skills, and educational experiences form an inclusive, independent, and responsible character, so that social transformation becomes a real test arena for whether the value of moderation is truly actualized in people's lives (B. Soleh & Hasanah, 2021). However, nuances of different contexts still emerge: changes in the digital era and students' exposure to non-pesantren religious information sources require pesantren to work on their authority dialogically, epistemically, and adaptive to the dynamics of religious information pluralism, as discussed in contemporary religious moderation discourses (Surur & Muzanni, 2023).

At the local and national levels, the transformation of social pesantren gives rise to the concept of moderation as the ability to build inclusive social cohesion for different groups. A transformative pesantren leadership model emphasizes the pressure of participation, dialogue, and social accountability as a way to uphold the values of moderation in the context of the plurality of religious identities. Research on kyai leadership transformation and transformative instruments shows how pesantren institutions mobilize religious traditions, moderate curriculum, and exemplary leadership to produce religious practices that are open to differences, without losing authentic Islamic identity. In this framework, social transformation serves as an evaluation mechanism: whether the values of moderation taught are truly manifested in the collective actions of students and the surrounding community, including the ability to critically and responsibly choose religious information sources in the digital era (Bosra et al., 2020). At the same time, the literature shows that institutional transformation of pesantren including curriculum reformulation, the application of transformative pedagogy, and the strengthening of egalitarian institutional culture have implications for the formation of a student identity that is more inclusive, tolerant, and relevant to the needs of Indonesia's multicultural society (Prakosa et al., 2023). The debate on the nuances of contention also emerges regarding how moderation is understood as an internal dynamic between local, global, and educational modernity, so recent studies emphasize the need for epistemic dialogue and student guidance in dealing with the diversity of religious information sources in the digital era (Surur & Muzanni, 2023).

3.1.6. Integration of Tradition, Authority, and Social Transformation

Derived from relevant theoretical synthesis, religious moderation in pesantren is seen as the result of a dynamic interaction between tradition, kyai authority, and social transformation that takes place in a linear manner. Tradition acts as an epistemic and cultural foundation that provides a framework for interpretation and appreciation of religious values; Kyai authority provides interpretation, legitimacy, and examples of behavior that form the religious praxis of students; Meanwhile, the transformation of the social arena becomes concrete where these values are actualized through social action, community service, economic empowerment, da'wah, and the formation of social cohesion. The relationship between these three elements is not linear but circular: social transformation can renew traditions and the way of kiai interpret teachings, which ultimately nourishes pedagogical practices and cultural institutions; On the other hand, changes in curriculum, learning methods, and the dynamics of students' lives can trigger a reinterpretation of traditions and a calibration of kyai authority. This perspective expands the focus of the study from the curriculum alone to a large ecosystem that involves leadership, institutional culture, social interaction, and the capacity of Islamic boarding schools in adapting to the flow of modernity and information pluralism (Prastyo & Inayati, 2022).

Contextually, this framework outlines that tradition provides the basis for values; authority interprets and transmits values; pedagogy and pesantren culture internalize these values; and social transformation actualizes values in community life. The feedback from the transformation process then stimulates adaptation, reinterpretation, and institutional renewal so that religious moderation is not just a normative concept but a living practice that is constantly reconstructed in the local context. Exchange studies confirm that moderation is not only formed through formal curriculum, but also through kyai leadership, institutional culture, daily practices, and the ability of institutions to respond to social change and digitization of information sources. Therefore, pesantren can be seen as a moderation ecosystem that mediates the interaction between religious values, traditions, authority, education, and social transformation in order to form a contextual, inclusive, and relevant religiosity for Indonesia's current multicultural society Asrori (Sutrisno & Fahmi, 2024).

3.2. DISCUSSION

3.2.1. Theoretical Framework: Islamic Boarding Schools as an Ecosystem of Religious Moderation

Pesantren as an ecosystem of religious moderation, not just an educational institution that transmits Islamic information. This ecosystem framework explains the mutual relationship between Islamic traditions, kiai authority, pedagogy, institutional culture, and social transformation in pesantren life, so that religious moderation emerges as a result of the continuous interaction of inherited values, the interpretation of authority, and social experiences that become the space for the actualization of these values. Contextually, three main pillars are described: first, tradition functions as an epistemic and cultural foundation that provides a source of values, identity, and religious orientation; second, kiai authority acts as a mechanism for interpretation, legitimacy, transmission, and exemplary values; Third, social transformation becomes an arena for the actualization of moderation in society, mediated by pedagogy and pesantren culture so as to produce a religious character that is reflected in tolerance, balance, respect for differences, non-violence, friendship, and the ability to live together in a pluralistic society. The ecosystem cycle model that although tradition influences authority, authority directs pedagogy, pedagogy shapes social practices, and social experience triggers the reinterpretation of tradition and the renewal of authority, so that diverse moderation is born from the continuous dynamics between these elements; Variations in local contexts and institutional dynamics also have the potential to influence the direction and tempo of transformation, as manifested in recent literature that tension the construction of pesantren moderation through the linkage between kiai authority, religious texts, educational models, communal practices, leadership, and institutional transformation. In an empirical framework, this framework demands a study that explores how the interaction between inherited values, interpretation of authority, and pedagogical practices forms concrete examples of religious moderation through patterns of dialogue, habituation, and communal experiences that contribute to tolerance, nonviolence, and respect for the pesantren community and its surroundings (Owari, 2021).

The concept of religious moderation in pesantren does not solely see pesantren as an educational institution, but rather as a dynamic ecosystem that refers to kiai authority, religious and educational text models, communal practices, leadership, and institutional transformation. Within this framework,

the relationship between the pillars of tradition as an epistemic-cultural foundation, kiai authority as a mechanism of interpretation and exemplarity, and pedagogy mediated by pesantren culture form an arena for the actualization of moderation through dialogue, tolerance, and habituation of human values in the lives of students and the surrounding community. This relationship is not linear; social transformation at the community level provides feedback that encourages the reinterpretation of tradition and the renewal of patterns of authority and pedagogy, so that the religious moderation ecosystem not only produces respect and respect for differences, but also becomes a forum for relevant social learning in the context of modern plural religion. In line with the latest literature, this framework emphasizes that pesantren moderation arises from the relationship between kiai authority, religious texts, educational models, social practices, and institutional transformation, so that its effectiveness extends to the institutional study of pesantren at the community level and public policy (Futaqi & Mashuri, 2023).

The third pillar, as well as the pedagogical and cultural mediation mechanism of pesantren culture, explains how this ecosystem facilitates the formation of inclusive religious character through dialogue patterns, dialogue habituation, and communal experiences that place tolerance, nonviolence, and respect for drought as the main dimensions. This model also recognizes that kiai leadership dynamics and institutional transformation play a role as agents of change that are able to direct pesantren educational and cultural practices towards a more tolerant and responsive community to local and national contexts. Departing from recent findings, this study emphasizes that religious moderation in pesantren requires a holistic understanding of how religious texts, epistemic traditions, educational models, and community practices interact within the framework of inclusive public policy and institutional development (Qodriyah et al., 2024).

3.2.2. Islamic Boarding School Tradition as an Epistemic Foundation for Moderation

The tradition of pesantren in the formation of religious moderation can be summarized as follows: literary systematization over the past five years shows that the tradition of pesantren does not only maintain religious heritage, but acts as a mechanism for reproduction of knowledge, the formation of identity, moral habituation, and the provider of an interpretive framework for social reality. The study of classical books, respect for scientific sanad, worship practices, collective life, and the formation of morals are important components in the formation of values that take place simultaneously; through this process, students are encouraged to understand that differences of opinion are part of the history of Islamic thought and moderation can grow from re-reading the social context. Empirical findings on pesantren show that religious moderation does not need to be built by relinquishing religious identity; On the contrary, moderation can be born from the epistemological reconstruction and actualization of Islamic values that are relevant to the needs of the times, including through institutional reconstruction and the integration of traditional expertise with modern curricula (Zakariyah et al., 2022). Moderation does not have to come at the expense of traditional identities; many studies emphasize the importance of the practice of rereading traditional values in the context of societal pluralism, which is implemented through curriculum, school culture, and Islamic boarding school culture that is oriented towards *tasamuh*, *tawasuth*, and *i'tidal* as daily living practices (Rezki et al., 2025). Concretely, various studies have found that internalized moderation takes place through *wasatiyyah* epistemology, integrative curriculum, kiai examples, communal practices, and adaptation to the digital environment, so that pesantren can function as a source of moderation if basic values are interpreted contextually and embodied in educational practices and social life of the pesantren community (Yusuf et al., 2024).

The empirical basis on how moderation is reproduced in the pesantren environment involves the mechanism of reproduction of knowledge through the tradition of the yellow book and scientific sanad, as well as collective living practices that form the intellectual habits of students to respond to plurality dialogically and non-confrontationally. Further research confirms the important role of kiai as an example (*uswah hasanah*) as well as the existence of an inexplicit curriculum (hidden curriculum) that internalizes the values of *tawasuth*, *tawazun*, *i'tidāl*, *tasāmuh*, as well as the concept of *wasatiyyah* in the academic arena and social praxis. These values are not only described as theoretical norms, but live through daily interactions in Islamic boarding schools, formal and non-formal education, and increasingly widespread digital community activities; together, this shows that moderation can grow internally from the tradition itself through the rereading and actualization of Islamic values in the

context of a plural society (Wahyudi & Alanshori, 2023). However, the nuances of differences between the study of local contexts (e.g. NU, Aswaja, or Madrasah-based Islamic boarding schools) and the potential variations in the implementation of moderation in different countries/regions are still recognized as the existence of important contextual variations to be reviewed in the synthesis and policy of Islamic education at the international level (Mala & Hunaida, 2023).

3.2.3. Kiai Authority as a Moderating Production and Transmission Mechanism

Authority in shaping the moderation ecosystem places kiai as a key actor that combines epistemic authority with moral-pedagogical authority. The epistemic authority of kiai not only guides the reading of religious texts and their relationship with social reality, but also serves as a curator of knowledge for students in the face of increasingly plural religious sources, especially in the digital era. Within this framework, the study shows that dialogical, contextual, and pedagogical kiai leadership allows religious moderation to grow through epistemological reconstruction, curriculum adaptation, and its example in responding to differences, conflict resolution, and interaction with the wider community (Sahil et al., 2022). The transformation of kiai authority from a monopoly of knowledge sources to the role of epistemic curators and mentors reflects the dynamics of moderation that does not solely rely on obedience, but rather a continuous process of interpretation that links Islamic treasures to the contemporary challenges of pluralistic societies (Adinugraha et al., 2023). This matter is increasingly complex in the digital society, where students obtain religious scripts from various sources; instead of weakening the legitimacy of the kiai, this phenomenon places the authority of the kiai as a center for purifying, interpreting, and guiding moderation practices that are relevant to local and global contexts (Zainal Abidin et al., 2023).

The dialectical attitude between tradition and authority shows that religious moderation is born from the interaction between the legitimacy of tradition and the ability of the kiai to interpret and adapt Islamic practices to contemporary issues. Empirical findings show that kiai leadership contributes to strengthening moderation through the selection of educators, curriculum development, and the formation of the identity of students who are accustomed to seeing plurality as part of the history of Islamic thought (Widodo et al., 2023). In the context of pesantren that are increasingly connected to social networks and digital media, kiai authority remains relevant when it is able to integrate the depth of tradition with social dialogue and is responsive to local and global cultural dynamics; thus, authority does not only function as an instrument of reproduction of traditions, but also as a mechanism for the transformation of tradition itself through curation, guidance, and epistemic direction that forms an inclusive and sustainable ecosystem of moderation (Wahyudi & Alanshori, 2023).

3.2.4. Pedagogy and Culture of Islamic Boarding Schools as a Space for Internalization

Tradition and authority do not automatically give birth to moderation, but rather require a pedagogical mechanism that is able to translate values into real attitudes and behaviors, so that pesantren is positioned as the main mediation framework in this study. The life of students who take place in a 24-hour community forms formal, informal, and non-formal learning spaces through interaction between students, kyai, ustaz, and the community, so that the values of tolerance, discipline, responsibility, and respect for diversity are strengthened through habituation and daily practice (*habitus*). Religious moderation here is seen as an internalized *habitus*, not just declarative knowledge, so that moderate orientation is achieved when these values are practiced in actions, ways of speaking, conflict resolution, and interactions with different groups; This view is consistent with contemporary literature that emphasizes the need for bridges between religious traditions, educational ethics, and pesantren-based education policy practices to develop a moderate culture that is inclusive of cultural diversity and beliefs (Paiman et al., 2023). In this framework, the study of religious moderation does not only assess the declaration of values, but also how these values are lived through pesantren culture, curriculum design, and transparent evaluation mechanisms so that religious moderation can serve as an ethical and social foundation for students in the digital era, with implications for increasing critical literacy, deradicalization, and social character development in line with sharia maqashid and contemporary humanitarian practices (Elsyam & Rossidy, 2024).

Research on transformative education at Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor shows that discussion, participation, learning, education management, and self-development activities can contribute to the formation of inclusive, independent, and responsible character. This strengthens the argument that moderation is a product of the entire educational culture, not just religious learning materials. Tradition and authority do not automatically produce moderation; both require a concrete pedagogical mechanism so that religious values can be moved into attitudes and behaviors in the daily practices of students. In this framework, pesantren culture and pedagogical practices that take place in the boarding school environment are mediation variables that link the values of moderation with the real actions of students, kiai, ustaz, and the surrounding community. Empirical research highlighting Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor shows that discussion, participation, education management, and self-development activities as a whole contribute to the formation of inclusive, independent, and responsible character, so that religious moderation emerges as a product of educational culture as a whole, not just religious learning material (Wijayanto, 2023). This phenomenon is consistent with the picture that pesantren, as institutions with formal, informal, and non-formal interactions, form a moderate habitus through habituation of living together and daily interactions among students, kiai, ustaz, and the surrounding community (Rozaq et al., 2024). Therefore, religious moderation is understood not only as declarative knowledge, but as an orientation that is internalized in language, how to communicate, how to resolve conflicts, and how to get along with different groups, a construction that grows from the culture of the pesantren itself and becomes the domain of habits that are inherent in students throughout their lives in the pesantren community (Rozaq et al., 2024).

Policy transformation towards religious moderation is also seen through literature reviews that emphasize the role of educational institutions, including pesantren, madrasas, and pesantren-based public schools, in internalizing the value of moderation through curriculum, school culture, and daily practice. These studies show that religious moderation operates as a holistic process that involves the habituation of values, formal and non-formal learning, as well as the use of learning strategies that emphasize interreligious dialogue, tolerance, and social harmony in the context of Indonesian plurality (Mukhibat et al., 2023). The implications of these findings are in line with the view that moderation is part of the habitus of pesantren education that goes beyond teaching materials, and affirms the role of pedagogy and pesantren culture as a driving center for inclusive and responsible character formation in the midst of the dynamics of a diverse community of beliefs (Wahid, 2024). In the context of modern Indonesia, the literature also emphasizes that the integration of religious moderation values needs to be supported by national policies and programs that utilize educational institutions as moderation laboratories, so that cultural aspects, curriculum, and social practices reinforce each other to produce a generation that is able to coexist peacefully (Warits & Muthhar, 2024).

3.2.5. Social Transformation as the Actualization of Religious Moderation

The relationship between pesantren and social transformation serves as a praxis test for religious moderation. In this framework, the success of moderation is not only measured from changes in the knowledge or attitudes of students within the boarding school environment, but also from the ability of these values to be translated into real actions outside the pesantren and have an impact on the lives of the wider community. Social transformation of pesantren can be realized through various channels, such as community education, da'wah, economic empowerment, religious literacy, humanitarian services, and involvement in solving community problems. Research shows that these activities encourage students to understand that religion has social consequences and that religious knowledge should give birth to public benefits, so that moderation becomes an integral part of community dynamics and not just a curricular output (Raikhan & Amin, 2023). Conceptually, this kind of transformation also serves as a praxis test for the values of moderation: tolerance is tested when students interact with different groups; anti-violence is tested in the face of conflict; national commitment is tested when dealing with diverse political identities; and respect for diversity is tested through cooperation with communities from different backgrounds (Naj'ma & Bakri, 2023). Thus, pesantren have the potential to produce socio-religious actors who are able to translate Islamic values into constructive actions in the public sphere, so that religious moderation is a product of the ability of pesantren institutions to transform culture, curriculum, and social practices in their surrounding environment (Ula & Shihabbuddin, 2024).

In the context of policies and practices, the literature shows that the transformation of education in pesantren can be a meeting point between curriculum reform, improvement of religious literacy, and strengthening of national commitments, tolerance, and nonviolence as part of the national religious moderation framework. This renewal not only changes teaching materials, but also makes the meeting between pesantren culture effective and the demands of diverse life in modern society, so that religious moderation becomes a real and operational social dimension in the daily lives of students and their communities (Rofiqi et al., 2024). The social transformation produced through community education and community participation also proves that religious moderation is a holistic process that requires synergy between formal, non-formal, and informal educational institutions, including pesantren, madrasas, pesantren-based public schools, and religious organizations that are in direct contact with the public. All three act as an educational ecosystem that collectively habits the values of moderation until it becomes a habitus that is able to resist the tendency of intolerance in various social, economic, and cultural arenas (Jailani, 2023). All of these findings confirm that the social transformation of pesantren is a practical test for religious moderation, where the social impact of religious learning is the main driver for an inclusive and peaceful national life (Ikhwan et al., 2023).

3.2.6. Dialectical Relations of Tradition, Authority, and Social Transformation

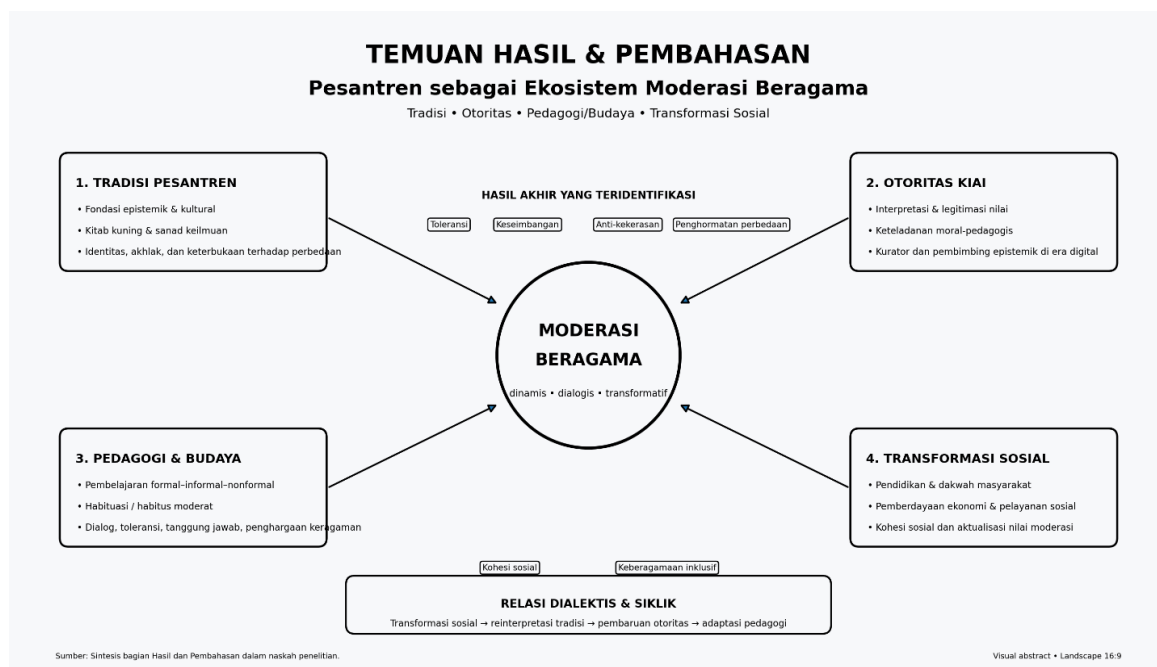
The relationship between tradition, authority, pedagogy/culture, and social transformation in the pesantren environment is dialectical and reciprocal, so that social transformation is a stimulus for the renewal of tradition and the restructuring of authority. Tradition serves as a foundation of values built through pedagogical and cultural traditions that internalize these values, while authority functions as an institution of interpretation and legitimacy of the values taught; the pedagogical process becomes a mechanism of internalization, while social transformation actualizes these values in socio-cultural practices. When pesantren faces social change, the need to reinterpret educational practices and orientations arises, so that the way in which authority is exercised and traditions are inherited are also remapped. In this theoretical framework, religious moderation emerges as a dynamic result that connects continuity of identity with adaptation to the changing social environment, a process that does not end in one direction but flows recursively through the reinterpretation of tradition and the renewal of authority. The last empirical support shows that pesantren inclusivity is formed through policy interactions, cultural management, the role of kyai, educational innovation, and da'wah practices, which facilitates moderation as a result of a contingent process between tradition and institutional reform (Kusumaningrum & Arifin, 2023). A number of studies focus on how pesantren balance traditional values with the demands of modernity through inclusive curriculum, kiai leadership, and da'wah practices, so that religious moderation becomes the foundation of education policies and social actions (e.g. through the internalization of moderation in pesantren curricula and the formation of an inclusive organizational culture) (Yumnah, 2020). This view is in line with the finding that social change in pesantren can be seen as a stimulus for tradition renewal and authority restructuring, rather than as a threat to the identity of the pesantren itself (Siroz, 2024). The debate and nuances between the variations of the model of religious moderation in pesantren vary according to the institutional context (e.g. NU, modern pesantren pesantren salaf pesantren), so this discourse demands cross-case mapping to understand how the dynamics of tradition-authority-pedagogy-social transformation operate contextually (Sahrudin et al., 2023). Conceptually, the proposed model shows a cyclical trajectory: Tradition, Authority, Pedagogy/Culture, Social Transformation, Reinterpretation of Tradition, Renewal of Authority, Religious Moderation, emphasizing that moderation is a dynamic process that confirms the continuity of identity while acknowledging the need for adaptation to changes in the social environment (Sutrisno & Fahmi, 2024).

This model guides cutting-edge research by highlighting how pesantren inclusivity is formed through the interaction of public policy, cultural management, the role of kyai, curriculum innovation, and da'wah practices, so that religious moderation is not just a final state but a transformative movement that has implications for social moderation and national Islamic education policies. Various studies show that religious moderation in pesantren includes the cultivation of tawassuth, tawazun, i'tidal, tasamuh, musyawah, as well as elements of leadership and national identity, which are implemented through formal-non-formal curriculum, halaqah learning, and cultural practices; this reflects the dynamics of internalizing the values of moderation as a medium to maintain social harmony

in Indonesia's diversity (Sutrisno & Fahmi, 2024). The potential conflict between tradition and modernity is faced with the implementation of moderation through national policies such as reforming the pesantren curriculum and integrating moderation values into State Religious study programs (PTKIN) and vocational madrasas, so that moderation becomes an operational framework for strengthening education, da'wah, and empowering the pesantren community in the digital era and Society 5.0 (A. K. Soleh & Rahmawati, 2023). In practical terms, the literature shows that the formation of religious moderation is influenced by the institutional network of pesantren (NU, As'adiyah, DDI) that prioritizes the relationship between religious tradition-autonomy, techno-social literacy in the modern era, and cross-institutional collaboration to maintain social stability and harmony between religious communities (HS et al., 2022).

3.2.7. IMAGES

The results of the study show that pesantren functions as an ecosystem of religious moderation formed through the dialectical relationship between scientific traditions, kiai authority, pedagogical-cultural practices, and social transformation. The tradition of pesantren through the yellow book, scientific sanad, and the formation of identity and morals becomes an epistemic-cultural foundation in instilling the values of tolerance, balance, respect for differences, and anti-violence; while the authority of kiai plays a role in providing interpretation and legitimacy of values while presenting moral-pedagogical examples and becoming epistemic guides in dealing with change, including the digital era. In the realm of pedagogy and culture, moderation is not only transmitted through formal learning, but also through habituation, daily interactions, dialogues, and social practices that form the habitus of moderation; These findings are in line with research that shows that moderation in pesantren is flexible, dynamic, and multidimensional through learning processes and extracurricular activities. Furthermore, social transformation expands the actualization of the value of moderation through education, da'wah, economic empowerment, social services, and strengthening community cohesion. Thus, religious moderation in pesantren is not static, but takes place dynamically, dialogically, and transformatively through cycles of social transformation, reinterpretation of traditions, renewal of authority, and adaptation of pedagogy, which ultimately strengthens inclusive social cohesion and religiosity.



Pesantren

Figure 1. Landscape of Research Findings: as an Ecosystem of Religious Moderation through Tradition, Kiai Authority, Pedagogy, and Social Transformation

4. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that pesantren is an ecosystem of religious moderation formed through the interaction between Islamic scientific traditions, kiai authority, pedagogy, institutional culture, and social transformation. Tradition becomes an epistemic and cultural foundation, kiai authority plays a role in providing interpretation and example, while pesantren education and culture internalize the value of moderation to be realized in social life. The novelty of the research lies in the integration of the dimensions of tradition, authority, and social transformation as a conceptual framework that views religious moderation not just as a learning material, but as a dynamic and contextual process of internalization and transformation of values. This framework contributes to the development of Islamic education studies and religious moderation globally by showing that tradition-based educational institutions can maintain religious identity while responding to plurality and social change through transformative education, dialogical religious authority, and social engagement to strengthen community cohesion and benefit.

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