

Preserving *kyai* authority in modern society

A case study of Pesantren Cidahu, Pandeglang, Banten

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ABSTRACT

A *pesantren* is a typical component of the Indonesian cultural heritage. Besides being thought of as one of the oldest type of educational institutions in Indonesia, *pesantren* have played a significant contributing role in the process of nation building in modern Indonesia. *Pesantren* have many roles in society in education, the economy and in the social and political fields in which *pesantren* alumni play a role. Currently, *pesantren* roles are being challenged by modernization and they have to change or transform into modern institutions in order to survive. Nevertheless, traditional *pesantren* continue to resist change and they insist on preserving their identity in terms of authority and student teacher relationships. This article seeks to analyse the efforts that the traditional Pesantren Cidahu in Banten makes to preserve its identity and to maintain its authority in modern society. By hanging on to modest practices, Pesantren Cidahu manages to continue to exert strong influence over its students and over the society in West Java in general.

KEYWORDS

Kyai, *pesantren*, Pesantren Cidahu, Banten, authority, modernization.

INTRODUCTION

Pesantren Cidahu is located in the village of Cidahu, Cadasari, in the district of Pandeglang, in the province of Banten. Pandeglang is a rural area where

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most people work as farmers while others are traders and labourers in major cities such as Jakarta and Bandung. Compared with other regions in Indonesia, Pandeglang is underdeveloped with slow economic growth and many people living below the poverty line.

The *pesantren* is named after the village of Cidahu to enable people to recognize the institution's location while it also reflects how well the *pesantren* has already been known in the region. Many *pesantren* in Indonesia adopt the name of the village or region in which they are located, for example Pesantren Cipasung in Tasikmalaya, and Pesantren Kempek in Cirebon, both in West Java, and Pesantren Sidogiri in Gresik, East Java, to name some examples. Most of them are traditional *pesantren*. People prefer to use the name of the village or the region not only to refer to the *pesantren* but also to show how influential the *kyai* in these areas are. As a result, *kyai* are known under the name of the village or the region as well, such as Kyai Cidahu who is famous in Banten.

Especially when a *kyai* is charismatic, he manages to maintain his authority as he is considered the source of information par excellence about the main truths of Islam. Because of this, a *kyai* occupies a highly special position and his students will obey his every wish without ever critically doubting the validity of his dogmatic religious teachings (Haryatmoko 2010:3). In this article, I will use the term "authority" to refer to religious authority comprising of a *kyai's* influence and competence and the obedience he elicits. I will show why it is important to study the authority of the *kyai* in this *pesantren* and I will explain how Pesantren Cidahu maintains its authority in the midst of the waves of modernization and globalization. To analyse the development of authority in this *pesantren* I use the Dhofier's three interrelated aspects of influence: *kyai*, *pondok* (dormitory), and curriculum (Dhofier 1982: 28).

THE PARADOX OF PESANTREN CIDAHU

Located in a remote area in the province of Banten, Pesantren Cidahu still upholds its modest and traditional educational management to this day. Indeed, most influential *pesantren* in Indonesia are located in isolated regions. This being so, they still manage to exert significant influence over society in general. *Kyai* build their *pesantren* in places far removed from modern urban society because of the impact society might have on their development. A *pesantren* in a rural area is often in the centre of attention. Because *pesantren* see themselves as important entities, people in their surrounding villages or even in the region where they are located recognize *pesantren* as the most important places in their region. Someone who wants to visit a *pesantren* can thus easily get information about where it is localized, no matter how far away it is removed from the city.

On the main road leading to Pesantren Cidahu, no signboard has been placed to indicate its location. It is part of the tradition within the most traditional *pesantren* in Banten that a real *pesantren* should not promote its existence by means of any media promotion. Since Pesantren Cidahu maintains this tradition, the institution's nameplate has become of no consequence. If the

pesantren should have put a nameplate, it would have discredited the sense of sincerity the founders had in developing the *pesantren*.¹ People should recognize a *pesantren* in a natural fashion through their acknowledgment of a particular *kyai*'s presence. A *pesantren* is considered a kind of magnet because people who need to find it will automatically be drawn to it. Therefore, promoting the *pesantren* by putting up a nameplate is considered to diminish sincerity and simultaneously and automatically decreases the respect for and the authority of its *kyai*.

In traditional *pesantren*, sincerity, which is the translation of the Indonesian term *ikhlas*, has become their most important principle in their continued existence. In order to survive, Pesantren Cidahu always tries to uphold original traditions. When my research team and I visited Pesantren Cidahu, Kyai Murtadlo, Kyai Cidahu's second son welcomed us warmly. Kyai Dimyathi (Kyai Cidahu) also known as Abuya Dimyathi or Abuya Cidahu is Pesantren Cidahu's founder. Kyai Murtadlo is an unassuming and agreeable person just like his father. During our conversation, he was charming and he never stopped smiling while his words were full of advice. He also did not hesitate to offer us his written special prayer when one of our team members asked for his prayer. During our meeting, he exuded confidence but at the same time he kept a low profile. He kept his face down as a symbol of self-effacement and he kept talking while admonishing us with advice. He also talked about his intimate relationship with many high-ranking military officers and civil servants in Jakarta.

Kyai Cidahu taught his sons to develop the *pesantren* but to keep away from any attempts to get benefits and material incentives from *dakwah* (Islamic propagations). A *kyai*'s main duty is to offer words of wisdom but not to trade in them. He should be unassuming and not consider himself the most prominent person among his followers. Therefore, when Kyai Murtadlo decided to write his father's biography, it took him a long time to decide whether it would be proper to write about and by so doing expose stories about his father. In the end he decided to write his book, which he entitled "*Manaqib Abuya Cidahu*", however, he did so without intentionally glorifying his father. Rather, it was an attempt to preserve his father's teachings.

Even though many people knew him (Kyai Cidahu) to be someone special and endowed with many sanctities, it would have been improper to directly mention this. Many people who loved him recognized his sanctity, which shows that he was considered a person very much loved by God. In writing the *Manaqib*, I always asked God to guide the writing process to help me to imbue it with a sense of sincerity and spirituality.²

According to Kyai Murtadlo, the writing process was not simply one of writing, editing, and printing, but also involved spiritual aspects. While writing the *Manaqib*, he kept his body clean and purified in order to reach the

¹ Interview with Muhtadi, (68 years), Pandeglang, 13 July 2013.

² Interview with Murtadlo (65 years), Pandeglang, 13 July 2013.

highest spirituality. The process of writing his father's story was not merely his own intention but also because God Himself guided him. He kept the structure and the tone of the book natural, and he relied on his mind and his heart to decide which aspects of his father's life should be written first. He believed that this is not just an ordinary book and that it is full of sanctity. He informed us that the book exudes the smell of perfume, which is a token of its sanctity.

When we wanted to purchase the book and inquired about its price, his reply was interesting. He explained that it is his family's tradition that they are not allowed to sell the book or to derive any profit from it as it would reduce the book's sanctity. In the end, he mentioned the amount of 250,000 rupiah, which he hastened to ask us not to consider its price, but merely for us to understand as a token of respect for the book's value. Indeed, it has no fixed price but people will show their respect for the book by paying a higher price in order to obtain the *kyai's* blessing. People will rate the book's price differently according to their sense of sincerity. Since the book has no fixed price, people would willingly rate it themselves and they usually pay a higher price. This is so because people will recognize the book's special "significance" that is its blessings; therefore, it has become priceless. Kyai Murtadlo himself courteously stated the following about the book's price:

We may not sell the *Manaqib* because our father taught us not to trade in religious knowledge. If you want to appreciate the value of this book, it is not part of a buying and selling activity.³

Although the *kyai* does not want to sell the book, paradoxically yet again, in reality, people who visit him paid more money than the real price of the book. The way people treat the *Manaqib* is also determined by the intimacy of their relationship with the *kyai*. People who highly respect him are prepared to pay more as they do not only consider its artificial meaning but rather seek the books' sanctity. The simple tradition of remaining silent and keeping away from publicity has in fact strengthened the *kyai's* authority. Not selling the book does not mean that he does not get a higher price for it. Through this tradition and by maintaining its sense of sincerity, Pesantren Cidahu has started to build its reputation in Banten and by now has become one of the most influential *pesantren* in Banten and even in the whole of Java.

However, these attempts at hiding the *pesantren* from modern society, for example by not putting any signboard on the road, not wanting to be exposed to the outside world and not setting the price of the book, prove a kind of paradox. Although Pesantren Cidahu does not like to be exposed to the public, in reality I observed that it is well known among ordinary people in Banten and among many high-ranking bureaucrats and political party leaders. In fact, Pesantren Cidahu remains a centre of political power and it provides religious references for its *santri* (students) and for ordinary people

³ Interview with Murtadlo, Pandeglang, 13 July 2013.

as well. Clearly, Pesantren Cidahu is well known for the profound influence it has for the people in Banten, and not from its sign plate, which, indeed, it does not need at all (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Pesantren Cidahu is a part of the surrounding neighbourhood and it blends in with the houses of the people in the village of Cidahu. There is no sign to indicate the *pesantren's* name (photograph by Ade Nurrahmah, 2013).

Why is Pesantren Cidahu's influence on its students and the people surrounding the *pesantren* still high in the midst of swift modernization and social change? The following part of the article will describe the characteristics of Pesantren Cidahu more in depth and will show how the *pesantren* preserves its traditional values. We will return to Dhofier's three aspects of a *pesantren* (the figure of the *kyai*, dormitory, and curriculum) that determined Pesantren Cidahu's development and the increase of its authority.

KYAI

In general, *pesantren* consist of the three interrelated elements mentioned above. Nowadays, these three elements have gone through significant changes but Pesantren Cidahu still preserves these elements in their original form.

A *kyai* occupies a pivotal role in influencing the prevailing education system and the behaviour of the students in a *pesantren* (Dhofier 1982: 29). He has a very special position for the students and they always follow-up whatever he commands. A *kyai* is a strong figure and he has the ability to control the truth. In this case, a *kyai* is considered to have total and unquestionable authority. Because of his authority and his ability to dominate religious truth, he manages to attract the masses in large numbers. He is a symbol of integrity, prestige, knowledge and charismatic leadership (Soebahar 2013: 70). The question we are concerned with here is the way the *kyai* in Pesantren Cidahu maintains

his religious authority. In order to get a picture of the changing patterns of *kyai*'s authority in Indonesia, it may serve to analyse the role of the *kyai* in the influential Pesantren Cidahu.

The *kyai* in Pesantren Cidahu occupies a key position. He is a highly respected religious scholar and whatever he says is gospel to the students. Currently, Pesantren Cidahu is famous mostly due to two figures, Kyai Muhtadi and Kyai Murtdlo, the late Kyai Cidahu's sons. Kyai Cidahu was a charismatic figure who founded the *pesantren* in the early twentieth century. His full name was Muhammad Dimyathi but later he was called Abuya Dimyathi. In the *pesantren*, Abuya Dimyathi's two sons have preserved their father's heritage by maintaining his style/model of management. Both are quite well known in Pandeglang mostly because of their father. Both organize *pengajian* (religious gatherings) that thousands of people coming from outside the *pesantren* attend. Compared to most modern *pesantren* in Java, the most interesting feature of this traditional *pesantren* is the fact that the brothers' religious gatherings always involve large numbers of people from the areas directly surrounding the *pesantren* but from other regions as well. Their houses have turned into places where many people visit to ask for their blessings and prayers.

In general, Pesantren Cidahu's existence cannot be seen in separation of its founder himself, Abuya Dimyathi. Abuya Dimyathi (Abuya Cidahu) is a very influential figure in Banten and is well known among many other influential *kyai* in Java. In Sufi terms, he is a *wara*, a humble person. He was born in 1920 in the village of Kahalang, Cadasari in the district of Pandeglang, Banten and he passed away in 2003. Dimyathi's grandfather was a nobleman named Tubagus Buang, who was also known as Sheikh Abdullah. His full name was Pangeran Ariya Qodli Djayasantika bin Pangeran Mandura bin Sultan Maulana Abdul Mufakhir Mahmud Abdul Qodir bin Sultan Maulana Hasanuddin Albantani bin Syarif Hidayatullah. The stories about Abuya Dimyathi, as stated in the book of *Manaqib*, are mostly related to his merits in relation to sanctity or *karomah*, wide networks, and teaching method.

Karomah is a special gift that God gives to the chosen people because of their close relation with the creator. In establishing his religious authority, it is important for a *kyai* to have the ability to beget *karomah*. Among his followers, many irrational stories circulate about Abuya Dimyathi, which they usually were told by his closest disciples or his family. Abuya Dimyathi was believed to be a *kyai* endowed with exceptional characteristics ordinary people do not possess. Kyai Dimyathi's followers and his family believe that only exceptional people are granted to become a *wali* (holy saint). Abuya Dimyathi somehow was considered as *wali*. Many stories in the *Manaqib* attest to these claims. As a child, for instance, Dimyathi used to wake up at night to worship and would not go back to sleep until the morning. He kept to this habit until he had grown into a great *kyai*.

Because of the many special events that happened to him, many people believe that Abuya Dimyathi was an emblematic *kyai* who had reached the

highest level. During his life, the people knew him as a person who focused on the hereafter and he lived in a very modest way. Therefore, he was regarded as a *kyai khos* (a special *kyai*). In Indonesia, only very few *kyai* who were very influential in society, have ever been considered *kyai khos*. In fact, *kyai* are distinguished into two types, *kyai akherat* (hereafter-oriented *kyai*) and *kyai dunia* (world-oriented *kyai*). The first type usually shies away from political activities, avoids publicity, while the second is often involved in politics and enjoys publicity (Turmudi 2004: 60). Indeed, those who are considered *kyai dunia* today mostly only think about the need to meet the interests of the world and they are often involved in worldly transactions.

Before becoming known as a great *kyai* in Banten, Abuya Dimiyathi spent most of his time studying in *pesantren* in Banten, West Java, Central Java, and East Java. Most of the *pesantren* he visited for his studies were recognized at the time as the most influential ones in Java. When he studied at these *pesantren*, he was already recognized as a special student. His love to study actually never ended and he often left his family at home only to continue his learning with a great *kyai* in Java.

He began his study at Pesantren Kadupeusing in Pandeglang under the guidance the great *kyai* Al-Alim Al-Allama Tubagus Abuya Abdul Halim bin Muhammad Amin. The *Manaqib* relates that he made the six kilometres distance from his village to the *pesantren* by foot. Along the way, he kept his face down and did not look to any directions except when he was about to cross a road (Dimiyathi 2008: 56). During his studies at Pesantren Kadupeusing, to meet his daily needs he only brought with him two litres of rice, one bottle of coconut oil and the one piece of clothing that he wore. Abuya Dimiyathi displayed this kind of humble behaviour from the time he was a child until he passed away. For his entire life, he only focused on the interests of the hereafter. He only partook of very simple food and he ate it moderately. He did not finish one full plate of rice a day. He only ate burned rice crust that stuck to the pan. He actually did not satisfy his hunger by just consuming a little bit of food because when he was asleep, he dreamed of eating much food and after waking up, he felt full. Often, he also merely ate papaya leaves, bean leaves, and sago. He acted this humbly out of principle because of his religious attitude and he firmly held on to these acts when dealing with his worldly needs.

After completing his study at Pesantren Kadupeusing he went to Pesantren Sempur in Plered, Purwakarta, West Java. He started his learning process in Sempur with a letter of introduction written by Kyai Abdul Halim to Kyai Sempur asking him to accept Dimiyathi as his disciple. In Pesantren Sempur, many exceptional stories about Dimiyathi were told. Because he did not have any money, Dimiyathi never used writing books or owned any religious books known as *kitab kuning* (loose-leaved books printed on yellow paper). He relied on his strong memory to remember the knowledge he got from his great teacher. During his study at Pesantren Sempur, he got married but he left his wife at home to continue his studies. After finishing his study of

religious knowledge in the most influential *pesantren* in Banten and West Java, Dimyathi continued his studies in Magelang and Yogyakarta in Central Java, and in Kediri in East Java (Dimyathi 2008: 59).

Abuya Dimyathi used a unique method to teach his sons and he instructed them to continue to develop the *pesantren*. In his view, the responsibility to educate the community was an integral part of his obligation to educate. When he taught religion in the *pesantren*, it meant that he taught his sons while other students, who attended his circle, also supported his effort to teach the other children. Abuya Dimyathi often took his sons along during his visits to *pesantren* outside Banten either to preach or simply to gain knowledge from famous *kyai*. During his visits, he gave many lessons to his sons through experiences. He intended to make them follow the way he interacted with people and gained knowledge. One of his sons, Murthadlo was the most fortunate one since Abuya Dimyathi often brought him during his "spiritual journey". Until the present, his two sons, Kyai Muhtadi and Kyai Murdadlo, still use these ways of instruction in Pesantren Cidahu and they are currently considered to have full authority.

Kyai Muhtadi is Abuya Dimyathi's eldest son. He is an unassuming figure who likely inherited his humble character from his father. He lives in a modest house surrounded by students who are always ready to help him. Just like his father, Kyai Muhtadi inherited his father's knowledge about the classical *kitab kuning*. Behind his house, he built a large hall in which he teaches the students and the community. The hall is also made to act as a shelter for the children. He hopes that his own children will continue his position and will become *kyai* in *pesantren*. The hall, according to him, is big enough to accommodate all his children and his entire future family.⁴

Muhtadi's teaching focuses on *kitab kuning*, which are divided into "big" books and "small" books. Big books include books on religious knowledge and jurisprudence and mostly discuss complex religious issues. They are larger and often contain many volumes. Small books, as the designation suggests, are smaller and have a simpler format. They discuss less complicated religious knowledge and the ways to execute daily religious practices. What Kyai Muhtadi teaches today is exactly what his father already taught in the past and nothing has changed.

Kyai Muhtadi's brother, Kyai Murdadlo, is somewhat different. He somehow inherited other aspects from his father. He follows his father's characters in terms of his wide networks and social interactions. He appears to be a more influential *kyai* than his brother and his name is widely known in Banten. Unlike his brother, Murdadlo lives in a large and luxurious house. Often, he tends to proclaim himself as the successor of his father's position and he had a closer relationship with his father compared to his elder brother. That is why he started writing his father's biography entitled *Manaqib Abuya Cidahu* as mentioned above.

If Kyai Muhtadi continues his father's role as a religious teacher equipped

⁴ Interview with Muhtadi, Pandeglang, 13 July 2013.

with profound knowledge of Islamic classical books, Kyai Murdadlo focuses more on his role of mediator with the wider community. He has become a source of public reference and contributes to solve problems in society. Kyai Muhtadi is thus better known as a "sufi" and as an ascetic figure while Kyai Murdadlo is better known for his popularity and proximity to the larger community. Both occupy special positions for the students in Pesantren Cidahu and in Banten's larger society.

KOBONG (SIMPLE DORMITORY)

A *kobong* is a kind of simple shelter for *pesantren*'s students where they sleep, study, and interact with each other. Most of the students live in a *kobong*. However, some students are called *santri kalong* 'fruit bats *santri*', because they only come to study during the day and return to their own houses during the night.

In Pesantren Cidahu, a *kobong* is a simple construction usually made of wooden boards with palm leaves for the roof. Some students like to stay in older *kobong* they inherited from senior students but others are freshly built by the students themselves. Other students prefer to bring a *kobong* from their own village and to rebuild it on the *pesantren* grounds. Around 10-20 students live in one large *kobong* which consists of one large room. It is clear that in Pesantren Cidahu, a *kobong* does not merely function as a place to stay and sleep but also has a special meaning in the process of transferring knowledge. The students are responsible to keep it clean and they have to develop a sense of belonging to their *kobong*. There is a sense of blessing within a *kobong* and everybody enjoys living in it. One of our respondents from West Java told us about his experience living in *kobong*.

I brought my *kobong* from my village and after finishing my study in the *pesantren*, I gave my *kobong* to other students. I was happy and enjoyed living in the *kobong* because it gave me a lot experiences about life.⁵

In Pesantren Cidahu, a special, historical *kobong* was once occupied by Abuya Dimyathi. It is famous among the students since many of them hope one day to be allowed to stay in it. Kyai Murdadlo told us that many important figures in the country have tried to live in this special *kobong* and in *pesantren* terms, this tradition is about being "splashed with the sanctity" of the *kyai* and his legacy. As described by Millie (2009), for *pesantren* students and followers of certain Sufi orders, being "splashed by sanctity" is very important. This kind of spiritual experience is very useful for a person who wants to follow in the spiritual footsteps of a great person. I was told that the former president of Indonesia, Abdurahman Wahid, had stayed in this special *kobong*. Besides Wahid, many other high-ranking officials from civilian and military institutions also lived in the *kobong* as a ritual to obtain blessings, if for only one night.

The *kobong*, which are built at Pesantren Cidahu, are integrated with the

⁵ Interview with Matin (55 years), 13 July 2013.

people's homes in the village of Cidahu. This integration intends to enable students to develop good interactions with villagers. Unlike most *pesantren* in Indonesia that exclusively build their building and dormitories away from the villagers, Pesantren Cidahu blends in with the villagers' houses. Indeed, for someone who visits the *pesantren* for the first time it will be hard to find the *pesantren* since there is no sign plate and there seems to be no difference between the *pesantren* and the people's dwellings. The only distinguishable feature is the unique *kobong* as they reflect the existence of Pesantren Cidahu (Figure 2).

The *kobong* tradition teaches students to live in very modest ways. Therefore, the *pesantren* is often accused of only wanting to teach students who care about their lives in the hereafter (Zazin and Umiarso 2011: 13). However, although the students in Pesantren Cidahu live very modestly, they are highly spirited in their daily lives and they meet students from different backgrounds in the *kobong*. In the *kobong*, students learn, memorize the Qur'an and the *kitab kuning*, cook, eat, wash, and do other activities together. Students at Pesantren Cidahu do not have to pay money because they come from lower class families. Their parents are mainly farmers or small traders who live in Banten and various places in East Java and Sumatra. Apart from performing their tasks in the *kobong*, they also help their *kyai* and perform daily activities, such as gardening and taking care of the daily affairs at the *kyai*'s house. Until now, all *kobong* are left in their natural conditions and they should not be changed. The students study at the *pesantren* because they have families or friends who are studying at the *pesantren* or had studied there before them. The students choose to study at Pesantren Cidahu because they want to be religious teachers or leaders in their region.



Figure 2. A *kobong* at Pesantren Cidahu gives students many experiences (photograph by Yuzki, 2013).

Nowadays, about 300 students stay at Pesantren Cidahu. Students who share the same *kobong* usually come from the same region and they inherit the *kobong* from their senior fellow students. Students from East Java, for instance, share the same *kobong* and they build close interactions during their stay as they build their networks and share information about the *pesantren* either with other students, families, and friends. Not surprisingly, most of them become sources of information on the reputation of the *pesantren*. The traditional linkages through family and friends are very strong and are maintained from generation to generation. The *santri* tradition in rural areas shows the interesting phenomenon that *santri* maintain their loyalties and obedience to their *kyai*. As in other *pesantren*, this tradition is fully preserved in Pesantren Cidahu. It is their *kyai* who disciplines them and who punishes them when they violate the *pesantren's* regulations (Alamsyah 2009: 75).

CURRICULUM

The curriculum in Pesantren Cidahu is very traditional and follows the model of religious education that was passed down by its founder. Since its establishment, the curriculum has never been changed. Students are required to visit the *kyai* to attend *pengajian* about the classical yellow books, which take place in the mornings, afternoons, and at night. This model of education allows for close interaction between the students and the *kyai*. When the *kyai* has finished reading and has giving his explanations on the contents of the yellow books, the students do not ask him any questions as it is considered impolite to so; therefore, the contents of the Islamic knowledge they just received should not be discussed but should be put in practice.

Students treat their *kyai* as the source of Islamic knowledge and they must respect him because he transmits God's knowledge. They should be spiritually prepared before attending his gatherings where the Qur'an or the classical books are discussed. Since the *pesantren* has its own curriculum, it does not follow the curriculum set by the Ministry of Religious Affairs. The students are required to master a particular classical book and to put its lessons into practice in public. Pesantren Cidahu does not use classes or other modern media for educational activities. The knowledge is transferred through the *sorogan* system in which the students sit around the *kyai* to listen to his reading and his explanations of the yellow books (Subhan 2009: 75).

At Pesantren Cidahu, students do not need to think about what knowledge they will get. The only thing they want is to get knowledge that is of *manfaat* (use) and the *barokah* (blessing) of their *kyai*. To get useful and blessed knowledge, students should not differ of opinion with their *kyai* in religious matters. Most students in this *pesantren* follow their *kyai's* views and suggestions regarding their daily activities, including political issues. It is clear that the educational system in this *pesantren* does not allow any disagreement between the students and the *kyai* as these are considered forms of disobedience, which will hamper the transmission of useful and blessed

knowledge. The *kyai* at Pesantren Cidahu has full authority in transferring knowledge and students must come to the *pengajian* completely focused and full of respect.

The students are accustomed to be patient, to wait for the *kyai* to arrive and they do not try to call him if he has not yet appeared. While waiting for the *kyai*, they are also not allowed to talk to each other. They need to prepare themselves fully to receive his knowledge. It is clear that the students do not only highly respect the knowledge they receive but also the person who passes it on. This is because the lives of those who disrespect the *kyai* will be useless. The model of education and teaching at Pesantren Cidahu ensures the close supervision of the *kyai* over his students and they are convinced that even in his absence, the *kyai* supervises and watches over them, no matter where they are.

Most students who study at Cidahu want to become religious leaders and preachers in their home villages and to spread the knowledge they obtained from their *kyai*. In this way, they continue to uphold this tradition and they teach what they have learned to the public. They teach people in the villages to respect the *kyai* and their knowledge. They try to imitate the tradition that they were familiar with in the *pesantren* and to apply it in their society as much as possible. They usually do this by starting to establish a new *pesantren* in their home village and by maintaining their ties with Pesantren Cidahu. They posit themselves as Pesantren Cidahu's representatives and persuade new students to go to Pesantren Cidahu to study religious knowledge. Through this network, the relations between the alumni and the *kyai* are maintained. They are ready to disseminate any information from their *kyai* in Pesantren Cidahu. Moreover, the alumni often visit him in order to preserve their connection.

Students who study at Pesantren Cidahu are not motivated by material incentives. They no longer think of getting a job after they have finished their study. They only think of learning seriously in order to become religious preachers. Their devotion to the *kyai* is considered a means to become successful in their lives. Therefore, they do not think of getting a formal degree from the institution since they only need the informal *ijazah* (certificate) of their *kyai*. In this way, the absence of a formal curriculum and because they do not get a degree at Pesantren Cidahu makes the students highly dependent on their *kyai*. Here, their study is not limited by time but rather depends on the patterns of interaction the students build between themselves and the *kyai*. It is the students' task to study sincerely and the *kyai* will inform them when they should stop. On average, students at Pesantren Cidahu spend at least five years there and some even take up to ten years to finish their "religious training". Some senior students even choose not to return to their villages but decide to devote themselves to assist their *kyai*. Among the students, becoming the *kyai*'s assistant is considered a prestigious position.

Unlike Pesantren Cidahu, other Islamic educational institutions use brochures and disseminate information to promote themselves. They rely on information from religious scholars and students. Pesantren Cidahu does not

need to promote itself through modern information media but relies on word of mouth and those who studied at the school will inform the public so they come to study at Pesantren Cidahu. Students who are studying there already understand Cidahu's highly traditional boarding conditions. Those who come from distant places just want to learn and seek the charismatic cleric's blessing.

Since the curriculum at Pesantren Cidahu is unstructured, the students can learn from direct interactions with the people around the *pesantren* and from their *kyai*. They observe how the *kyai* deals with his guests and assist him. Later, they may imitate the *kyai*'s ways and apply them in their own lives. Some senior students are assigned to serve guests, listen to the people's problems, and they accept the simple gifts visitors bring as presents for the *kyai* (Figure 3). Villagers who come to ask for the blessings of Kyai Murdadlo or Kyai Muhtadi at Pesantren Cidahu usually bring rice, sugar, and basic food. In the event of *mauled* (the Prophet's birthday) and *haul* (the yearly celebration of Abuya Cidahu death) thousands of people will attend. Villagers and the *kyai*'s followers bring simple gifts while the *kyai* serves food and drinks. In 2013, both Kyai Muhtadi and Kyai Murdadlo organized a *haul*, they slaughtered buffalos and the meat was distributed to their guests and followers. This is the part of the teaching curriculum that students likely favour the most.



Figure 3. Most students learn the meaning of live from their daily interactions with their clerics and ordinary people. As seen at this photograph, two students are given responsibility to receive some charitable gifts from villagers to be exchanged with the *kyai*'s blessing (photograph by Ade Nurrahmah, 2013).

In Pesantren Cidahu, the students' strong dependence on their *kyai* in obtaining knowledge makes them tend to accept anything the *kyai* provides unreservedly. There is no reason to reject anything the *kyai* says or to dispute with him regarding the teachings and his knowledge because students at

this level do not have any alternative reading or reference material. In the *pesantren* tradition, especially in Pesantren Cidahu, students must directly sit with the *kyai* in order to obtain authoritative Islamic knowledge and they are not allowed to learn individually or directly from printed materials. Learning Islamic knowledge from anyone else but the *kyai* or another teacher is considered unlawful since it might invite Satan to take over, something that is much feared and should be avoided at all cost. Therefore, gaining blessing and beneficial knowledge are far more useful than the amount of knowledge a student might gain.

CONCLUSION

The efforts of the *kyai* in Pesantren Cidahu undertake to defend their religious authority can be seen in the way they preserve all the learning traditions that were handed down by their father, Abuya Cidahu. They live harmoniously and their lives are full of happiness while they serve God by maintaining the teachings of the founders in educating their students. Even though both Kyai Muhtadi and Kyai Murtadlo disagree that they are considered agents that preserve *kyai* authority in the *pesantren* because they shy away from publicity and modernity, they actually have gained wide attention from the Muslim community in Banten and surroundings.

In the *pesantren*, the role of the *kyai* as cultural brokers has not changed much because his successors guard almost every tradition their father practiced. However, currently, the full authority Abuya Dimyathi once possessed is divided over his children and not all of them were able to inherit Abuya Cidahu's authority and charisma. However, they were able to follow only part of their father's traits. Kyai Muhtadi mostly inherited his father's persistence and competence in mastering the classical books, while Kyai Murtadlo continues his father role in mediating people's day-to-day concerns.

Indeed, the *kobong*, as a kind of dormitory for students, are kept in their original condition and until now, they have not changed. Many students have obtained rich experiences during their stay in a *kobong* and having lived there taught them a lot about the meaning of life. Their future success as religious leaders and preachers is closely related to their daily life in the simple *kobong*. It offers unforgettable spiritual experiences and everlasting interactions.

To reinforce their strong influence over their students, Kyai Muhtadi and Kyai Murtadlo both maintain the traditions of educational socialization by providing for an unstructured curriculum that differs much from the modern curriculum. The teachings that focus on the study of the classical books rely on the *kyai* as the source of knowledge. Students should gather at his house in order to receive religious knowledge based on the time schedule the *pesantren* provides. The time that is set up for religious gatherings should be respected and any guest who visits the *pesantren* during teaching hours has to wait until the *kyai* has finished. Even though the curriculum at Pesantren Cidahu looks informal and unstructured, its curriculum is well established with reference to the absolute authority of the *kyai*.

In general, the ability of the *kyai* at Pesantren Cidahu in maintaining religious authority symbolizes his capacity to survive in the face of the challenges of modernity. *Santri* and the society surrounding the *pesantren* consider the *kyai* at Pesantren Cidahu as a source of knowledge and a focus of religious reference. The students' very strong dependence on their *kyai* is the key why they still highly respect the *kyai* at Pesantren Cidahu. However, right now the number of *pesantren* in Indonesia that follow the traditional model Pesantren Cidahu practices has declined because of their inability to survive modernity and the social changes that are happening rapidly in society (Soebahar 2013: 41).

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