Political Change and Community Development at Traditional Islamic Boarding School

Akhmad Nurul Kawakip¹, Imam Rofiki¹ and Abdul Fattah¹
¹Faculty of Education and Teacher Training, Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang, Indonesia

Keywords: Islamic Boarding School, Political Change, Community Development.

Abstract: It was common to see, during new order regime (Soeharto era), that traditional Islamic Boarding School (pesantren) stayed away from political involvement. In this sense, the Islamic boarding school does not receive assistance from Indonesian government and strives to be as independent as possible in various ways. The paper explores how the role of traditional pesantren has been developing during reform era. Ethnographic approach is employed to explore the conception and practices of Pesantren Sidogiri concerning political change and community development. Using community development approach, it argued that Islamic boarding school applied human right approach with its emphasis on equality, dignity, and justice.

1 INTRODUCTION

Important social and political changes occurred in the country during the Reformation era. In this sense, the role of Indonesian pesantren seems to be significant in the political context, particularly in East Java. In the 2004 general election, for instance, the members of DPD (Dewan Perwakilan Daerah or the upper house of the national parliament) from East Java dominated by whose backgrounds are pesantren. Pesantren can be divided into traditional, modern, and independent. Traditionally the teaching of traditional pesantren based on classical texts (Kitab Kuning), which is mainly refer to Syafi’i school of thought (Tan, 2014).

The result of general election is also proof that pesantren have been able to respond to social and political changes. Indonesian pesantren for a long time had reputation as cultural symbol of Indonesian social institution which very much based on grass-roots. When Pesantrens are associated with Nahdlatul Ulama or NU (the awakening of Muslim religious scholars), they have the opportunity to show that their philosophy of education is based on religious tolerance (Islam Rahmah li al-’Alamin). In this sense, NU also promote tolerance Islam, which is called as Islam Nusantara, it is religious ideology based on the doctrines of Aswaja (Ahl al-Sunnah wa al Jama‘ah). It is also common to say that Pesantren is identical with NU and the vice versa. Points out that the NU is the most loyal and perfect representation of a Muslim group who declare to the Sunni doctrine in Southeast Asia. Concerning the religious ideology, it is wrong to assume that Pesantren is the breeding ground of radicalism. Moreover, Islam spread in Indonesia through pesantrens was “Sufi Islam” which was easy to melt with local culture (Alimi, 2017; Barton, 2017; Barton and Fealy, 1996; Nathan and Kamali, 2005).

Regarding Indonesia social-political life, it was common to see the Indonesian government paying little attention to pesantren development. As indicated by Bull, “during 1994-1995 government favoritism was perceived toward Muhammadiyah and led some pesantren people to feel some distance from Soeharto regime”. In this sense, the pesantren community seemed to be marginalized by the Indonesian government (Lukens-Bull, 2005; Rahman Alamsyah and Hadiz, 2017).

The paper will focus on how Pesantren Sidogiri in East Java has responded to the political change. We examine the pesantrens’ policy toward Indonesian government legal framework for pesantren educational system. While the term “community development” refers to pesantrens’ people participation in social-development over surrounding society. For these purposes, this paper answered two primary research questions: how has the Pesantren Sidogiri responded to political change,
2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Educational system is not a neutral area, because it is always socially constructed, culturally mediated and politically intervened. It is like two sides of the same coin; it can become a site of cultural action for freedom and at the same time, operate as a means of cultural action for domestication (Luksens-Bull, 2001; Ouvrard-Servanton et al., 2018). In line with this perspective, Freire has pointed out: “Neutral education cannot exist. It is fundamental for us to know that, when we work on the content of educational curriculum, when we discuss methods and processes, when we plan, when we draw up educational policies, we are engaged in political acts which imply an ideological choice; whether it is obscure or clear is not important” (Freire, 1974).

Meanwhile, in the perspective of sociology of education, the role of government is viewed as “direct involvement”. The government has involvement in education, whether through ideological beliefs, funding, or setting policy (Savage and Lingard, 2018).

What is the contribution of pesantren to community development approach? In this point of view, it is important to note that one of significant contributions to the development of educational system in pesantren is the attention from Indonesian government through Ministry of religious affair (MORA), particularly since post-Soeharto era. Since 2005 MORA has already provided scholarships for pesantren students to pursue degree in various State Universities in Indonesia. It is argued this phenomenon add to pesantren educational tradition, particularly which is called ‘santri kelana’ (wandering santri). According to Dhofer, one of the important aspects of the pesantren educational system is the emphasis on the journeying of its students. A typical wandering santri was a santri who was travelling from one pesantren to another pesantren. The aim was to seek knowledge for the best authorities on the various specialist Islamic branch of knowledge. Such tradition was the wandering santri in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It seems appropriate to say that wandering santri was attributed to santri who traveled from pesantren to another pesantren (Barton, 2017; Dhoufier, 2014; Schlehe, 2017). Today, in the era of reformation, the wandering santri is traveling from pesantren to various universities. We also argue, this tradition has positive values for the wondering santri’s future roles as well as to answer the negative image of pesantren. This is because; it was common in the past to see that the pesantren curricula were emphasizing pacification and memorization rather than a curriculum for empowerment and critical thinking.

Furthermore, pesantren environment was isolated from the developments of sciences and modern society. Those who were in the circle of the pondok pesantren were not able to solve the problems which arose due to modern development (Jainuri, n.d.). The role of doctor, lawyer, engineers, educators, economist, needed by community, could not be trained by a traditional Islamic educational institution, but by a modern one. Thus the pondok pesantren seemed not to serve the national plans for modernization adequately. All these assumptions might be true in the past; however, this assumption seems not to be true anymore, since many aspects today have changed in pesantren.

In regards to the community development approach, Geertz argued that the pesantren community and kiai could not contribute to Indonesian development. In this sense, he also predicted that pesantren community were unable to deal with the social change that has already happened in the society (Geertz, 1960). This paper claims the pesantren community has responded in dealing with the challenges of social life or community development issues.

3 METHOD

The main purpose of this article is to explore how traditional pesantren deal with the political change and the approach to community development. The research data obtained from literature review, document analysis and fieldwork in Sidogiri pesantren that is located in Pasuruan East Java, Indonesia. We employed ethnographic method to explore the conception and practices of Pesantren Sidogiri concerning political change and community development. The fieldwork conducted for about 50 days.
4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Legal Framework for the Pesantren Educational System

Reform era Government policy towards the pesantren is reflected in Law No. 20/2003 on National Educational System (Undang-Undang Sistem Pendidikan Nasional), article 4 (30). The Law effectively identifies pondok pesantren as a subsystem of the national educational system. The Law states: "religious educational models can be formed as diniyah, pesantren, pasraman, pabhaja samanera and the like (Agama, 55).

In 2006, the Minister of Religious Affairs (SK Menteri Agama) recognized the qualifications granted by some traditional pesantren (salaf pesantren). This policy makes them equivalent to those received by students who graduated from Indonesian state-owned schools. This policy enables santri to continue their studies in Indonesian universities. As a result, the pesantren graduates, particularly at the senior level, were able to undertake tertiary studies, not only in state Islamic colleges such as IAIN, UIN or STAIN, but in other private and state universities as well (Basyuni, 2008).

The effort to integrate the pesantren into the national educational system also continued and accelerated in 2007 with the Government Regulation. The Government issued Regulation No.55 of 2007 for the pesantren educational system. With this Regulation, the pesantren have been integrated into the Indonesian national educational system. As a consequence, the Indonesian government must pay attention to the pesantren’s educational development, particularly by providing a small subsidy to some pesantren. One of notable Indonesian Government subsidies is through BOS (bantuan operasional sekolah) or the operational subsidy for schools. The Indonesian government provided Rp. 235,000 per year per student at the primary level. While for a student at the senior level, the Government provided Rp. 324,500 per year. From this point of view, according to the deputy of Pesantren Sidogiri, the Pesantren decided to accept the Indonesian government subsidies:

"Related with BOS bantuan operational sekolah (operational subsidy for schools) which is provided by the Indonesian government, Pesantren Sidogiri does not have the right to refuse the Government’s financial support. Since the purpose of these funds is to support the santri, the Pesantren decided to accept the donation; since the BOS is not allocated for the Pesantren as an institution”.

The pesantren deputy’s attitude suggests a new big concern towards external supports, including from the Indonesian government. This is considered as a new approach since in the past the Pesantren Sidogiri refused any financial support from the Indonesian government. Some of the old ambivalence remains. The government’s assistance will be refused when it is given to the pesantren as an institution but accepted when the recipients are the santri (student).

Regarding accreditation, the Indonesian government also recognised the pesantren’s qualifications, including some of the traditional pesantren’s certificates. Ministry of Religious Affairs data indicates that today there are 32 pondok pesantren salaf throughout Indonesia who qualifications have been accepted the government (report of Subdit V 2007; unpublished). While, During the Soeharto Regime, the Indonesian government did not recognize all pesantren salaf certificates. Their certificates are also considered as equal to those of Madrasah Aliyah (Islamic senior high school). With this 2007 government regulation, the traditional pesantren have become more integrated into the Indonesian educational system. For instance, the State Islamic University of Malang has accepted Pesantren Sidogiri’s certificates. Another private Indonesian university is also offering scholarship for Pesantren Sidogiris’ student, such as STIE Tazkia (Institute for Islamic Economics) Bogor, UNAS (Bandung National University), Malang Islamic University (UNISMA) to pursue degree at various program.

Furthermore, based on the Regulation above, the Indonesian government through the Ministry of Religious Affairs has also provided the opportunity for the traditional pesantren to run a 9-year compulsory education in the primary level. In Indonesia, or elementary educational level is called nine-year compulsory education. It is hoped that children under 18 years old will be able to pursue at least nine years of schooling. This policy makes the pesantren equal to that of the national system run by public schools, with the requirement to add some ‘secular’ subjects such as mathematics, Bahasa Indonesia and natural sciences. It is easy for some pesantren to accept the State policy since the Regulation does not interfere with the pesantren’s traditional study of the Kitab Kuning and the development of the pesantren’s educational values. The Indonesian government policies have significant implications for the pesantren as their graduates can continue their studies in public schools and higher education institutions. At the same time, the traditional pesantren have retained their original
identity as they have designed their secular curricula, rather than simply adopted that of the government. The government Regulation will also contribute to the program of compulsory education launched by the Indonesian government in 1994 in becoming a reality. In Indonesia, according to the law, children should attend primary school for nine years, but in reality poverty was mostly to blame for this not occurring. In the 1945 Constitution of Indonesia, article 31, section 1, states: “every citizen shall have the fundamental right to education.” Traditional pesantren also share the responsibility to ensure that compulsory education becomes a reality. In short, the pesantren become the alternative schools that are affordable for the village children and adolescents.

With regards to the support of Pesantren Sidogiri’s development and financial autonomy, the Pesantren had a reputation for refusing any donations support or subsidies from outside organizations, including the Indonesian government and international development agencies. In 2006, for instance, an AusAID’ LAPIS program (Learning assistance projects for Islamic schools) tried to offer assistance. However, Pesantren Sidogiri refused to accept this donation. There is a general perception in Indonesia that an approach like that at Pesantren Sidogiri is considered conservative. Majid argues that the policy of some pesantren trying to distance themselves from the Indonesian government are regarded as the manifesting a non-cooperative attitude. This has been obvious since the colonial era and remains with some pesantren policies even now (Majid, 2009). However, for the Pesantren Sidogiri community, this approach is regarded as no more than a manifestation of an attempt to keep good traditions to develop self-reliance not as an opposition towards the Indonesian government policy. The deputy of Pesantren Sidogiri explained: One of the important teaching values in Pesantren Sidogiri is self-reliance (kemandirian); it is based on prophet teachings: ‘self-reliance is the foundation to be successful’. Based on this principle, we work hard in order not to depend on others, society, and even the Indonesian government. We have a slogan ‘we should contribute to this country.’ Therefore we think about what we should give to this country not what we should get from this country.

This is to say, once again, for Pesantren Sidogiri that self-reliance is not opposed to the state, but reflects a determination to be independent. Regarding financial support and educational programs, the Pesantren is independent of outside support. The objectives of social and educational programs from Pesantren Sidogiri are more directed to the needs of the surrounding pesantren community, rather than to the State programs.

Therefore, this article indicates that in the post-Soharto era, the Pesantren were increasingly more open to intervention from Indonesian government. This is might be because some pesantren leaders felt more involved in the political process and they also had parliamentary representatives.

4.2 Pesantren’s Social Role: Community Development Issues

In addition to religious training, pesantren also play a social role. Clifford Geertz, when identifying the role of Javanese pesantren, argued that pesantren and kiai were only influential in their community and not among the other two socio-religious communities: the priyayi and abangan. This research argues that in social life or community development issues the contributions of pesantren did influence not only the pesantren community or santri but also the broader society. In this sense, pesantren are also concerned with economic development and social transformation and they do not only focus on their role as traditional educational institutions, but the pesantren also contribute in reducing poverty (Geertz, 1960).

Pesantren Sidogiri is well known for its achievements in economic development. Initially, the growing interest of Pesantren Sidogiri was to develop social programs based on the pesantren initiative. This is noted in a statement from one of the leaders of pesantren Sidogiri:

It was initially because of the concern held by Sidogiri’s teachers about the fact that many people, particularly surrounding the pesantren, practice riba (interest) when they get loans from money lenders. The Pesantren teachers at that time realized that the Pesantren should be able to address this social problem. He also refers to Islamic values which is called as al-umkhawah Islamiyah (Islamic brotherhood), and social ibadah (worship). In this context, he quoted the prophet tradition (al-hadith), “anyone who does not take care of Muslim Community affairs is not my followers (ummah).”

To address this social problem, in 1997 Pesantren Sidogiri decided to establish its microfinance institution, a Shariah finance model called Baitul Mal wa Tamwil (BMT) or Islamic micro saving and lending cooperative and Kopontren (the Pesantren cooperative). Although BMT institutions are not under Pesantren Sidogiris’ management, BMT managers are consists of elites and alumni of the Sidogiri Islamic Boarding School. Initially, the BMT capital was Rp. 13.5 million ($ USD 1800) collected from the pesantren’s teachers. After seven years in operation, the BMT has 12,470...
customers. Financial transactions reached Rp.35 billion with assets of Rp.8.1 billion. Kopontren Sidogiri offers financial service programs for people such as mudharabah or a partnership where the Pesantren provides the capital. Syirkah wujub or the partnership is based on goodwill, credit-worthiness and a contract, Ijarah or leasing finance (Bakhri, 2004).

The practice of BMT and Kopontren provides interest-free loans for people to develop small and micro enterprises. The most important purpose of giving interest-free loans is to help people escape from “lintah darat” (moneylenders). Even though the amount of loans is considered inadequate to develop a new form of ‘micro-business’, this program has attracted many people since it generates opportunities to increase their capital to enhance their income. In addition, the program raises productivity. Those who have already run a small business can increase the volume of “dagangan” (goods or commodity). While those who are beginners have the opportunity to develop alternative income sources other than farming.

Indirectly, the Pesantren deals with unemployment issues and urbanization problems. According to the deputy of Pesantren Sidogiri, Masykuri Abdurrahman, through credit, they create productive activity in which they can employ many people. The difficult situation in the agricultural sector has led many young people to leave their villages and go to cities or abroad for work. By giving an opportunity for young people to run micro-businesses in the village, it is hoped that the move to the cities can be minimized.

Furthermore, he argues that by distributing and allocating micro credit to poor people, it empowers them to be self-reliant and prosper. Many successful strategies for helping the poor escape from poverty begin with supporting a family or community’s assets and then find ways to create alternative incomes. In this way, the pesantren also contributes in reducing poverty. The pesantren’s perspective on poverty is fundamental problem that must be solved as explained by a staff of Pesantren Sidogiri cooperative.

The task of the Muslim community is not physical war, but to combat poverty and other social problems such as malnutrition, providing housing, clothes and medical assistance for the needy people. The purpose of this task should not only be for Muslims, but also for all people who live in the same community. In this matter, I would like to make a comparison. Although wine or beer is forbidden in religious teachings, it still has some benefits for human beings, while poverty has no benefits at all for human society. This is our task; we should put our knowledge into practice.

Year by year, the economic development at Pesantren Sidogiri has demonstrated significant progress. The Pesantren has started to produce and sell drinking water in collaboration with an outside company (Air Mineral Santri). The revenue from these business activities provides income to support the operation of the Pesantren. Besides contributing to the independence of the pesantren, the Koperasi Pondok Pesantren (the Pesantren cooperative) also offers learning experience opportunities for the students, particularly those who are studying mu’amilah (economics). These business activities run by pesantren are managed by the santri, thus giving them an opportunity to experience practical training and business management. In short, the Sidogiri cooperative opened a new opportunity to get a job for the community. The case of Pesantren Sidogiri is also proof that even though the pesantren makes an effort to maintain the traditional form, the pesantren is also able to deal with some aspect of community development. The increasing number of employee can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1: The number of employee in Pesantren Sidogiri Cooperative.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The creation of pesantren cooperative and BMT (Islamic micro saving and lending) is advocated by community development in Pesantren Sidogiri, benefit both for student, local people and the pesantren. The pesantren enjoy great advantages from the community development activities. There is a range of advantages behind the establishment of such institution. First, as an educational institution, Pesantren Sidogiri should be able to provide considerable sums to finance its own operational costs, including construction of educational facilities. Secondly, the establishment of profitable institutions was also intended to strengthen the independence of independent pesantren regarding education funding.
5 CONCLUSION

The fall of Indonesian president Soeharto in 1998 opened a political opportunity for civil society groups, including the traditional pesantren community, to express their political, social, and educational ideals more openly. The Indonesian government also made an effort to develop the quality of traditional pesantren educational system. In this sense, the relationship between the pesantren communities and the State has shown a cooperative approach. The pesantren also deals with the needs of society. Therefore, we argue that Pesantren Sidogiri has its own strategies to deal with and respond to social challenges. In this sense, the effectiveness of Pesantren Sidogiri to attract people participation in community development cannot be separated from pesantren’s values such as self-sufficiency, social worship and Islamic brother-hood (al-ukhuwah al-Islamiyah). In short, being traditional does not mean the pesantren ignored to economic development and social transformation.

It is undeniable that in social life or community development issues, the contribution of pesantren is important. Pesantren not only focus on the role of an Islamic educational institution, but it is also concerned about economic development and social transformation of the community, such as reducing unemployment and eliminating poverty. The creation of BMT or microfinance institution, Kopontren (the Pesantren cooperative) shows that the Pesantren indirectly deals with social life and unemployment issues. In this sense, pesantren provides interest-free loans for people who would like to develop ‘small and micro-enterprises’ and create opportunity to get job. Using the two principal foundations in community work as identified by Ife and Tesoriero (Ife and Tesoriero, 2006). The first principle is a social justice, or human right perspective refers to equity, dignity, and justice. The second principle is ecological perspective with its emphasis on air pollution, global warming, and water sanitation. It is argued that the community approach at Pesantren Sidogiri reflect the human right perspective.

REFERENCES