

Pesantren and Social Equilibrium: A Structural Functionalist Analysis of Religious Value Clashes

Pesantren dan Keseimbangan Sosial: Analisis Fungsionalis Struktural tentang Benturan Nilai-Nilai Keagamaan

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Abstract: *This article aims to analyze the relationship between pesantren and surrounding communities by analyzing religious value clashes through the perspective of Talcott Parsons' structural functionalism. Existing studies on pesantren-community relations have largely focused on educational transformation, cultural adaptation, and religious authority, while limited attention has been given to understanding value conflicts as mechanisms that contribute to social equilibrium. Employing a qualitative case study approach, this research draws on in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis conducted in several pesantren in East Java. The findings reveal that religious value differences emerge in areas such as educational aspirations, gender norms, technological change, and social behavior. However, these differences do not necessarily lead to social disintegration. Instead, pesantren and communities continuously negotiate competing values through dialogue, social participation, and institutional adaptation. Applying Parsons' AGIL framework, the study demonstrates that pesantren perform adaptation through educational innovation and modernization, goal attainment through moral and religious formation, integration through community engagement and social mediation, and latency through the preservation of Islamic traditions and religious culture. This article argues that religious value clashes should be understood not as signs of dysfunction but as adaptive processes that help maintain social stability and equilibrium. The study contributes to the sociological understanding of religion by reinterpreting structural functionalism within the context of Indonesian Islam and conceptualizing pesantren as adaptive religious institutions capable of balancing tradition and social change.*

Keywords: Pesantren; Social Equilibrium; Structural Functionalist; Religious Value.



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Abstrak: Artikel ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis relasi antara pesantren dan masyarakat dalam menghadapi benturan nilai-nilai keagamaan melalui perspektif struktural fungsional Talcott Parsons. Studi-studi sebelumnya mengenai hubungan pesantren dan masyarakat umumnya berfokus pada transformasi pendidikan, adaptasi budaya, serta otoritas keagamaan, sementara perhatian terhadap benturan nilai sebagai mekanisme yang berkontribusi pada terciptanya keseimbangan sosial masih relatif terbatas. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan studi kasus kualitatif dengan teknik pengumpulan data berupa wawancara mendalam, observasi partisipatif, dan analisis dokumen yang dilakukan pada beberapa pesantren di Jawa Timur. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa perbedaan nilai keagamaan muncul dalam berbagai aspek, seperti orientasi pendidikan, relasi gender, penggunaan teknologi digital, dan pola perilaku sosial masyarakat. Namun demikian, perbedaan tersebut tidak selalu berujung pada konflik atau disintegrasi sosial. Sebaliknya, pesantren dan masyarakat secara terus-menerus melakukan proses negosiasi nilai melalui dialog, partisipasi sosial, serta adaptasi kelembagaan. Dengan menggunakan kerangka AGIL Parsons, penelitian ini menemukan bahwa pesantren menjalankan fungsi adaptation melalui inovasi dan modernisasi pendidikan, goal attainment melalui pembentukan moral dan karakter keagamaan, integration melalui keterlibatan sosial dan mediasi antara berbagai kelompok masyarakat, serta latency melalui pelestarian tradisi Islam dan budaya pesantren. Artikel ini berargumen bahwa benturan nilai keagamaan tidak semata-mata mencerminkan disfungsi sosial, melainkan merupakan proses adaptif yang berkontribusi pada terpeliharanya keseimbangan sosial (*social equilibrium*). Secara teoritis, penelitian ini menawarkan reinterpretasi terhadap teori struktural fungsional dalam konteks Islam Indonesia dengan memposisikan pesantren sebagai institusi keagamaan adaptif yang mampu menyeimbangkan antara pelestarian tradisi dan tuntutan perubahan sosial.

Kata Kunci: Pesantren; Keseimbangan Sosial; Fungsionalis Struktural; Nilai Keagamaan.

Introduction

Pesantren have historically occupied a strategic position within Indonesian Muslim society. Beyond functioning as institutions of Islamic learning, pesantren serve as centers of moral formation, social leadership, and cultural reproduction. Their influence extends beyond the educational sphere and shapes the religious ethos of surrounding communities. Throughout Indonesian history, pesantren have played an important role in preserving Islamic traditions while simultaneously responding to changing social realities. Within this social context, religious institutions play a vital role in fostering moral cohesion and social order. Among these, the pesantren (Islamic boarding school) stands as one of Indonesia's most influential educational and religious institutions. It highlights that social interaction is not just a preference but an essential aspect of human life and survival.¹

The pesantren shaping the moral and spiritual character not only of its santri (students) but also of the surrounding community.² In practice, it has acted as a center for the transmission of Islamic knowledge and as an agent of socialization and

moral regulation for local society.³ Contemporary social transformation, however, has introduced new challenges to pesantren-community relations. Processes of modernization, digitalization, globalization, and value pluralization have altered social expectations regarding education, gender relations, economic participation, and religious practice. These developments frequently generate tensions between the normative values promoted by pesantren and the pragmatic orientations found within wider society.⁴ From a sociological perspective, this conflict of values can be analyzed through the theory of structural functionalism proposed by Parsons, which views society as a system consisting of interdependent parts that work together to maintain social order.⁵ Pesantren and society at large are regarded as social subsystems, which help to maintain the larger social system. Understanding how these systems negotiate differences is therefore essential to comprehending how religious institutions sustain relevance and harmony in a rapidly changing social landscape. If religion plays two main functions, namely religion as a perspective on the world that is beyond human reach, giving rise to an awareness of the world, and religion as a ritual means of connecting humans with the unreachable.⁶ Previous studies have examined pesantren primarily through perspectives of educational transformation, religious authority, cultural adaptation, and modernization. Scholars such as Zamakhsyari Dhofier, Martin van Bruinessen, Ronald Lukens-Bull, Robert Hefner, and Noorhaidi Hasan have demonstrated the dynamic role of pesantren in negotiating social change. Nevertheless, limited attention has been paid to understanding how religious value differences between pesantren and society contribute to social equilibrium from a structural functionalist perspective. A pesantren is the most unique form of non-formal education, unlike any other non-formal educational institution.⁷

This gap is significant because value differences are often interpreted as indicators of conflict or institutional crisis. In reality, such differences may function as mechanisms that stimulate adaptation and integration within society. Talcott Parsons' structural functionalism provides a useful framework for examining this process because it conceptualizes society as a system composed of interconnected subsystems that continuously seek equilibrium. When differences emerge, such as divergent interpretations of religion, gender norms, or social behavior, these are not regarded as dysfunctions but as temporary phases of disequilibrium that stimulate adaptive adjustments within the larger social structure. Parsons' theory suggests that such adaptive processes are necessary to sustain systemic balance in changing social environments. It represents a religiously oriented learning environment led by a *kiai* or *ustadz*, typically centered around a mosque and equipped with dormitories and other facilities that support religious activities.⁸ The pesantren has been the backbone of

Islamic education in Indonesia, maintaining its traditional values while adapting to the dynamics of social change.

Historically, pesantren served not only as centers of religious learning but also as agents of social transformation, embedding moral discipline and collective identity within the broader Muslim community.⁹ However, modernization and globalization have introduced value pluralism, leading to growing tensions between pesantren traditions and societal practices, particularly regarding modern education, gender roles, and social behavior.¹⁰ Differences in religious interpretation, gender norms, or social practices are not considered dysfunctions but temporary imbalances that drive adaptation and reintegration within the social system. Pesantren that build collaborative communication with community leaders show higher social cohesion and less conflict. This study therefore aims to analyze how pesantren negotiate religious value clashes with surrounding communities through the lens of Parsons' structural functionalism. The novelty of this article lies in its reinterpretation of the AGIL framework within the context of Indonesian pesantren and its conceptualization of pesantren as adaptive religious subsystems that simultaneously preserve tradition and facilitate social adaptation.

Research Method and Analytical Framework

This study employs a qualitative sociological approach using a case-study design to examine how pesantren and surrounding communities negotiate religious value differences in contemporary Indonesian society. Field research was conducted between January and September 2025 in several pesantren in East Java representing traditional, semi-modern, and modern educational orientations. A purposive sampling strategy was employed to select informants who possessed direct experience in pesantren-community interactions, including kiai, ustadz, community leaders, and local residents.

Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. Semi-structured interviews focused on perceptions of religious values, experiences of social tension, institutional adaptation, and community engagement. Participant observation was conducted during religious activities, educational programs, community service initiatives, and public events involving both pesantren and local communities. This qualitative approach was chosen to enable a more comprehensive understanding of social interactions, religious practices, and value negotiations within their natural settings.¹¹

Data analysis followed thematic analysis procedures supported by the interactive model of Miles and Huberman, encompassing data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing.¹² Interview transcripts, field notes, and documentary materials were coded and categorized into themes related to religious value clashes, adaptation

strategies, social mediation, and institutional functions. To ensure validity and reliability, triangulation was conducted by comparing interview findings, observations, and documentary evidence.

The analytical framework of this study is grounded in Talcott Parsons' structural functionalism. Parsons conceptualizes society as an integrated social system composed of interdependent institutions that collectively maintain stability and social order. Through the AGIL framework—Adaptation, Goal Attainment, Integration, and Latency—social institutions respond to environmental changes while preserving systemic equilibrium. Adaptation refers to the capacity of institutions to adjust to changing social conditions; Goal Attainment concerns the achievement of collective objectives; Integration involves the coordination of social relationships and normative expectations; and Latency refers to the preservation and transmission of cultural values across generations.

Within this perspective, pesantren are understood as religious subsystems embedded within broader social structures. As institutions that preserve Islamic values, moral discipline, and religious traditions, pesantren must simultaneously respond to modernization, technological development, economic transformation, and increasing social pluralism. Consequently, differences in religious values between pesantren and society are not interpreted merely as social dysfunctions but as adaptive processes through which social actors negotiate change and restore social equilibrium. This analytical framework provides the basis for examining how pesantren maintain their religious authority while remaining socially relevant amid contemporary social transformation.

This framework is further supported by previous studies demonstrating that pesantren continuously negotiate between preserving religious traditions and responding to modern social developments. Accordingly, the concept of religious value negotiation in this study refers to the process through which different actors reconcile competing understandings of morality, authority, social norms, and religious practices within changing social contexts.¹³

Religious Value Clashes between Pesantren and Society

The findings indicate that differences in value orientation remain one of the most significant challenges in pesantren-community relations. These differences do not necessarily emerge from theological disagreements but rather from contrasting responses to modernization. While pesantren remain centers of Islamic learning and moral guidance, their interaction with increasingly pluralistic societies exposes differences in values, norms, and worldviews.¹⁴ Pesantren demonstrate adaptability by integrating modern curricula, entrepreneurship, and community service without abandoning their religious foundations.¹⁵ The kiai and ustadz play mediating roles,

connecting the sacred with the social. Their efforts align with Parsons' AGIL framework: pesantren adapt to modernization (Adaptation), maintain religious goals (Goal Attainment), foster community harmony (Integration), and preserve cultural continuity (Latency). Thus, pesantren emerge as dynamic institutions capable of balancing spiritual authenticity with societal transformation.

The diversity of pesantren development reflects their adaptive responses to contemporary challenges. While some focus on deepening classical Islamic scholarship, others emphasize formal education or vocational skills in fields such as agriculture, technology, and entrepreneurship. According to the Ministry of Religious Affairs, more than 42,000 pesantren will be active across Indonesia by 2025, functioning not only as religious institutions but also as social and cultural forces. Their digital transformation, therefore, must remain contextual and aligned with each institution's unique identity. Several informants reported tensions regarding educational aspirations, gender interaction, digital technology, and lifestyle practices. Community members often prioritize economic opportunities and practical skills that support social mobility, whereas pesantren emphasize moral discipline, religious commitment, and spiritual development. Within this system, caregivers act as both transmitters and transformers of values, guiding and motivating students to integrate religious principles with social realities.¹⁶

The classification of pesantren as a subculture, however, remains contested. This concept largely reflects an external academic perspective rather than internal identification by pesantren communities themselves. While many pesantren maintain traditional regulations regarding interaction between male and female students, surrounding communities increasingly encounter more flexible social norms influenced by higher education, social media, and urban culture. These differences occasionally generate debate but rarely escalate into serious conflict.¹⁷ One community leader explained that some parents expect pesantren to provide greater technological and entrepreneurial training in response to contemporary labor market demands. Meanwhile, several pesantren leaders expressed concern that excessive emphasis on economic pragmatism may weaken moral and religious commitments among younger generations. This adaptability affirms that pesantren remain dynamic agents of moral continuity and social transformation, capable of mediating tradition and modernity within Indonesia's evolving social structure.¹⁸ This process is evident in pesantren initiatives to integrate modern educational subjects, vocational training, and community development programs, which bridge the gap between traditional Islamic values and contemporary needs.¹⁹

In an interview conducted with KH. Abdul Hakim Mahfudz (Gus Kikin), the caretaker of *Pondok Pesantren Tebuireng* and Chairman of *Nahdlatul Ulama East Java*, he emphasized that pesantren play a transformative role in maintaining

religious moderation, social harmony, and community empowerment. According to him, pesantren are not only centers for transmitting Islamic knowledge but also agents of the social change that help balance spiritual values with contemporary realities. He noted that “*pesantren must remain grounded in classical Islamic traditions, yet be open to new forms of knowledge and social engagement.*” Gus Kikin highlighted the importance of pesantren education in shaping *santri* who are intellectually independent, socially responsible, and morally strong capable of engaging constructively with both local and global communities. Furthermore, Gus Kikin explained that the relationship between pesantren and society must be understood as a *symbiotic interaction*. The community supports the pesantren materially and morally, while the pesantren contributes to the community’s spiritual, educational, and cultural well-being. Gus Kikin further highlighted that the relationship between pesantren and society is mutually reinforcing. The community sustains pesantren through trust and support, while pesantren nurture the community through education, guidance, and moral leadership. He stressed that the strength of pesantren lies in their service to the people and their commitment to inclusivity, tolerance, and national harmony embodying NU’s vision of *Islam rahmatan lil ‘alamin*. Thus, pesantren function as living social institutions that integrate faith, knowledge, and civic responsibility within Indonesia’s evolving society.²⁰

The contribution of pesantren to society’s religious ethos is also seen in their educational methods. Through daily routines collective prayers, Qur’an recitation, character training, and close interaction with kiai students internalize a disciplined religious lifestyle. When these students return to their communities, they become carriers of pesantren-based religious values, reinforcing a culture of piety and strengthening traditional Islamic practices. This dynamic aligns with Martin van Bruinessen’s observation that pesantren are key institutions in the preservation and reproduction of classical Islamic scholarship and social morality within Indonesian Islam. The relationship between pesantren and society, however, is not one-directional. It is a mutually reinforcing interaction. Communities contribute to the survival and relevance of pesantren by providing social legitimacy, economic support, and cultural space. Local traditions, community expectations, and societal challenges shape how pesantren adapt their teachings and practices to remain meaningful. The findings demonstrate that religious value clashes should be understood as differences in social orientation rather than direct ideological confrontation. Both pesantren and society continue to recognize each other’s legitimacy and importance within local social life.²¹

From Parsons’ structural functionalist perspective, these tensions represent moments of temporary disequilibrium rather than dysfunction. They reflect an adaptive

process in which the social system seeks to restore balance through pattern maintenance and integration. Field evidence shows that kiai and ustadz serve as cultural mediators, bridging the normative world of religious education and the practical expectations of local society. Their leadership enables pesantren to maintain spiritual legitimacy while accommodating social change, including economic modernization and technological advancement. The communal system means that one must submit to the interests of the collective, in the future there can be differences of opinion, due to changes in circumstances and situations. (Blackwood, 2005). Despite this, many modern pesantren are progressively including women in leadership and education, signaling a process of institutional differentiation and integration in Parsonian terms.²² Indeed, the function of Islamic boarding schools is broader when compared to formal education in general.

Pesantren Adaptation in the Era of Modernization

Religion has long been a fundamental element of human life, shaping both individual behavior and broader social structures. Beyond personal belief and ritual, it functions as a powerful force that organizes cultural norms, social relationships, and communal identities. As an inseparable part of daily life, religion guides people's moral reasoning, decision-making, and interactions with others. Its teachings promote virtues such as honesty, compassion, and responsibility, fostering both personal integrity and collective harmony. Several pesantren have introduced entrepreneurship training, digital literacy programs, foreign language education, and vocational courses. These innovations reflect efforts to respond to societal expectations without abandoning traditional Islamic values.²³ The relationship between pesantren and the community is mutual: pesantren guide the community spiritually, while the community provides social support, legitimacy, and a cultural environment that allows the pesantren to continue growing. This reciprocal relationship helps maintain a rooted, moderate, and relevant Islamic tradition in everyday life.

The study found that pesantren actively adapt to changing social conditions. Rather than rejecting modernization, many institutions selectively incorporate modern educational programs while preserving religious foundations. Functioning as both educational and social institutions, they sustain ethical discipline and communal cohesion. The pesantren thus exemplify how faith-based education can balance tradition and modernity, serving as an indigenous model of adaptive transformation that aligns spiritual values with social progress. This spiritual grounding can play a crucial role in maintaining mental well-being.²⁴ As a religious dissemination institution, a pesantren can be seen, for example, through its mosque, which is not only intended for the students (santri) but also functions as a public mosque used by the community for worship, religious studies, and other social activities.²⁵

The *pesantren* operates as a complex system composed of several interrelated elements. The central figure in this system is the *kiai*, who serves as the founder, leader, and primary decision-maker of the institution. His authority and vision largely determine the direction, development, and success of the *pesantren*. Complementing his role are the *santri*, or students, who dedicate themselves to learning Islamic knowledge under the guidance of the *kiai*. Without *santri*, the existence of a *pesantren* would be meaningless, as they represent both the driving force of religious learning and the extension of the *kiai*'s social influence. The *santri* are conscious of their religious, social, and national responsibilities, acting as the human foundation that sustains the vitality of *pesantren* life. In Java, *pesantren* institutions exhibit a rich diversity in orientation and social dynamics. *Pondok Pesantren Tebuireng* and *Pondok Pesantren Bahrul Ulum Tambakberas* in Jombang represent semi-modern *pesantren*, where traditional Islamic scholarship is combined with general education and vocational training. These *pesantren* have integrated state curricula while preserving the authority of the *kiai* and the values of discipline, humility, and devotion. In contrast, *Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor* in Ponorogo is a pioneer of modern Islamic education, emphasizing language mastery, leadership training, and independence within a structured boarding environment. On the other hand, *Pesantren Sarang* in Rembang maintains the *salaf* model, focusing on classical Islamic texts (*kitab kuning*) and a close *kiai*–*santri* relationship grounded in traditional methods of transmission. Despite their differences, these institutions share an egalitarian spirit, where social interaction among *santri* tends to minimize social hierarchy, emphasizing piety, merit, and community solidarity. Religion also acts as a unifying force that strengthens social bonds. Through collective worship, communal activities, and shared traditions, religious communities create spaces where individuals can feel a sense of belonging and solidarity. These social connections help reduce feelings of isolation and foster cooperation among members of society. In many cultures, religious events and celebrations serve as moments when people come together, reinforce shared values, and renew their commitment to collective well-being. This communal aspect of religion highlights its function as a builder of social cohesion. The brief description above explains to some extent how Islamic boarding schools respond to various changes around them.²⁶

Beyond its moral, emotional, and social roles, religion contributes to the resolution of daily problems by offering frameworks of interpretation. One *pesantren* administrator emphasized that modernization should not be interpreted as secularization. Instead, modernization is viewed as a strategy for strengthening the social relevance of Islamic education. Such perspectives indicate that *pesantren* increasingly perceive adaptation as an institutional necessity. These perspectives help individuals

make sense of life's complexities and guide them in responding to challenges constructively. For example, religious principles encouraging patience, forgiveness, or perseverance can help individuals navigate interpersonal conflicts or difficult circumstances with greater wisdom and calmness. Religion can also inspire ethical decision-making in professional, familial, and public spheres, thereby influencing behavior in ways that promote fairness and accountability.²⁷ A *pesantren* is also a microcosmic society that possesses social norms which shape its social structure.²⁸

Pesantren have served as centers for Islamic scholarship, moral formation, and community guidance. They function not only as educational institutions but also as agents of socialization and moral regulation, shaping both students (*santri*) and the surrounding society. This insight contributes to global debates on religious modernization by positioning *pesantren* as a functional bridge between faith and progress, exemplifying an indigenous model of adaptive transformation grounded in local values and global relevance. In a brief interview, KH. Hasib Wahab, a respected religious leader and *pesantren* caretaker, stated that *pesantren* serve as the moral foundation of Indonesian society, shaping character and preserving Islamic traditions amid modernization. He emphasized that value disparities between *pesantren* and the wider community should be addressed through dialogue, exemplary leadership, and social participation, rather than confrontation. According to him, "*pesantren must be open to change while maintaining their spiritual roots, so harmony grows from mutual understanding*".²⁹ Traditions in Islamic boarding schools are not just routines, but a reflection of identity that embodies noble values. They encompass manners, scholarly lineage, service, and simplicity that have been passed down from generation to generation through exemplary behavior. Values such as "manners before knowledge" are not just slogans, but the lifeblood of students in their daily lives.³⁰

Koentjaraningrat explains that Javanese Islam manifests in both *syncretic* and *puritanical* forms. The *syncretic* aspect reflects a fusion between pre-Islamic cultural elements and Islamic teachings, while the *puritanical* side adheres strictly to orthodox Islamic principles. Religion, therefore, functions as both a cultural and social phenomenon it expresses belief in the Divine while structuring human relationships and communal practices. From this dual perspective, *pesantren* serve as cultural and social institutions that preserve and transmit Islamic traditions rooted in the lived experiences of local communities.³¹ They are inseparable from their social environment, continuously adapting to its changes while maintaining their religious identity. Because the present gains consistency as the temporal synthesis of past and future through the subject's full engagement in their work.³²

The process of acculturation occurs when individuals or groups with distinct cultural backgrounds engage in sustained, direct interaction, leading to mutual influence and transformation of cultural patterns. Such interaction involves the exchange

of values, traditions, and social practices in ways that promote understanding and coexistence. In this dynamic, foreign cultural elements are gradually integrated into local wisdom without erasing the authenticity of either culture. Rather than creating loss, this process contributes to positive cultural evolution and social harmony. In a short interview, Sadarestuwati, a member of the Indonesian House of Representatives and long-time resident of a pesantren community, emphasized that pesantren play a strategic role in shaping community ethics and strengthening grassroots education. She noted that most communities view pesantren with deep respect and trust, seeing them as centers of moral guidance and social service. According to her, “*pesantren not only teach religion but also cultivate social responsibility and national unity among the people*”.³³

However, some pesantren display a more feudal pattern of social relations, particularly those rooted in strong tarekat (Sufi order) traditions such as Pesantren Pesulukan Thoriqoh Agung in Tulungagung and Pondok Pesantren Al-Falah Ploso in Kediri. In these environments, the kiai often holds near-absolute spiritual authority, and the institutional structure reflects reverence and obedience rather than participatory interaction. This feudal tendency does not diminish their religious significance but illustrates the spectrum of social organization within Indonesian pesantren from democratic and rational to charismatic and hierarchical systems. As noted by Steenbrink, the pesantren represents a “living microcosm” of Indonesian Muslim society, balancing continuity and change across generations of religious education.³⁴ As one of Indonesia’s oldest educational systems, the *pesantren* embodies this principle of acculturation. It not only sustains Islamic scholarship but also acts as a bridge between religion and local culture.³⁵ Ultimately, this study contributes to the sociological understanding of how religious institutions sustain their relevance in plural societies. By applying Parsons’ structural functionalism, it clarifies that conflict between traditional and modern values functions as a mechanism of social balance, not disintegration underscoring pesantren’s continuing structural significance in maintaining harmony within Indonesia’s modern social order.

The Social Mediation Role of Kiai

The research further reveals that kiai play a crucial role as cultural mediators. Their authority extends beyond religious instruction and includes conflict resolution, community consultation, and social leadership. Their origins can be traced to pre-Islamic Hindu-Buddhist learning traditions, which were later Islamized while maintaining local cultural elements. Deeply rooted in Indonesia’s social fabric, pesantren have long served as centers of Islamic scholarship, moral formation, and social integration. They not only transmit religious knowledge but also cultivate ethical consciousness and a spiritually grounded worldview among students. If our country

had not been colonized, perhaps the growth of its education system would have followed the path taken by the pesantren.³⁶ Religious culture refers to the overall religious atmosphere that shapes the attitudes, behaviors, habits, and spiritual sensitivity of individuals within a community, including those in Islamic boarding schools (pesantren). It is not limited to outward rituals, but encompasses a deeper internalization of values that influence how people think, act, and interact in their everyday lives. In this sense, religious culture represents a comprehensive manifestation of religious principles often described as *kaffah*, meaning holistic or complete so that religion becomes the foundation of one's worldview and conduct.

This cultural formation includes shaping students' attitudes and mindsets so that they develop a way of viewing the world through the lens of religious ethics. It fosters a way of thinking rooted in spirituality, moral awareness, and responsibility toward oneself and society. These values such as sincerity, discipline, and humility shape their character and extend beyond the pesantren walls, influencing community life and reinforcing moral cohesion. Teachers and religious leaders serve as role models, demonstrating how ethical behavior is practiced in everyday interactions. Over time, these values become integrated into their identity, influencing how they respond to situations, interact with others, and fulfill their responsibilities within the institution as well as in the wider community.³⁷ In religious and social life, the pesantren serves as the main center where the community entrusts the education of their children. People wish for their children to become knowledgeable individuals who also possess good morals and piety. When disagreements emerge between pesantren and community members, kiai often function as intermediaries capable of translating religious principles into practical social guidance. Their position enables them to maintain institutional credibility while simultaneously accommodating community concerns.³⁸

The paper found that differences in value orientation between pesantren and local communities remain one of the main sources of tension in daily interaction. While pesantren emphasize discipline, modesty, and spiritual devotion as core social values, surrounding communities tend to adopt more pragmatic and modern perspectives shaped by economic, technological, and cultural change. For example, some community members perceive pesantren traditions such as strict gender separation or conservative dress codes as outdated, while pesantren leaders view community lifestyles as signs of moral decline. Through these activities, pesantren become integrated into local social structures rather than isolated from them. As a subculture deeply rooted in Indonesia's Islamic tradition, *pesantren* education functions not only as a center for learning but also as a medium for transmitting moral and cultural values. These values emerge from a dynamic interaction between religious teachings derived from classical Islamic texts (*kitab kuning*) and the personal integrity and

leadership of the *kiai*.³⁹ Khofifah Indar Parawansa, Governor of East Java, emphasized that *pondok pesantren* are not only centers of Islamic education but also pillars of social and cultural development in the region. She described pesantren as “*moral fortresses that nurture integrity, discipline, and social empathy among the younger generation*.” According to her, pesantren have long contributed to maintaining East Java’s social stability through religious moderation and community empowerment. Khofifah explained that many pesantren have expanded their roles beyond religious instruction, engaging in entrepreneurship, social welfare, and disaster response programs demonstrating their adaptive capacity in addressing modern societal challenges.

Religious culture shapes students’ character by integrating religious values into their daily thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors. It creates a holistic environment that nurtures moral virtues, discipline, and harmonious social interactions within the community. Fundamental changes in the socio-cultural structure have led to the need to contextualize socio-cultural structures, including the pesantren education system. The need for reconstruction is in line with the principle of “*Al-muhafadhatu ‘alā Qadīm al-shālīh wa al-akhdzu bi al-jadīd al-ashlāh*.” This mediating role contributes significantly to reducing potential tensions arising from value differences. It also demonstrates that religious authority can function as a mechanism for social integration rather than social division. Pesantren values do not need to be sacrificed for the sake of modernization. Even though it must change, adapt, or undergo metamorphosis, the world of pesantren must remain true to its distinctive or unique identity.⁴⁰ Regarding the issue of religious value clashes between pesantren and society, Khofifah noted that such tensions often arise from differences in interpretation and social modernization, rather than from fundamental contradictions. She stated that “*pesantren must continue to act as mediators between tradition and transformation*,” ensuring that Islamic values evolve in harmony with social change. The provincial government, she added, has supported this effort through education partnerships, women’s empowerment initiatives, and interfaith dialogue. In her view, pesantren represent a model of inclusive religiosity that strengthens civic unity where faith and culture interact constructively to build a peaceful and progressive East Java society.⁴¹

Negotiating Religious Value Clashes through Social Adaptation

The religious culture cultivated within pesantren extends beyond ritual practices. It encompasses the internalization of ethical and spiritual values such as sincerity, discipline, brotherhood, and compassion that guide students’ worldviews and conduct. These values, aligned with the holistic Islamic concept of *kaffah*, are continuously transmitted through daily routines, communal worship, and close mentorship

under the *kiai*. As scholars like Hans Jonas and Harun Nasution emphasize, such values form the moral compass that unites conscience and reason in the pursuit of virtue. This value system can be recognized by the existence of several key values, which will be explained briefly below. From the perspective of treating life as worship, it is possible to understand how a love for religious knowledge can be so strongly instilled in Islamic boarding schools.⁴² Of course, Innovation and technological development in Islam are not only permitted but should be seen as efforts to improve the quality of human life.⁴³ Pesantren play a central role in shaping the religious ethos of Indonesian Muslim society. As traditional Islamic educational institutions, they function not only as centers for transmitting religious knowledge but also as spaces where moral discipline, communal life, and everyday piety are formed. Saifuddin Zuhri highlights how pesantren historically served as cultural and spiritual guardians for Muslim communities, fostering values such as devotion, humility, and respect for religious authority. Strengthening civil society is not an option, but a strategic necessity for a nation that wishes to achieve true prosperity and justice.⁴⁴

These values then extend outward from the pesantren environment into surrounding communities, influencing their patterns of worship, ethical behavior, and social interaction. Moreover, religious culture within pesantren functions as a transformative process that molds students into morally responsible individuals. Through the integration of faith-based values into daily routines, thought patterns, and social behavior, pesantren graduates develop the moral and spiritual foundation needed to contribute positively to their communities. In this way, pesantren not only preserve Indonesia's Islamic heritage but also embody a dynamic synthesis of tradition, ethics, and social responsibility. Thus, religious culture becomes a powerful force that shapes personal identity, strengthens communal harmony, and promotes the cultivation of virtuous character across generations.⁴⁵

Field findings indicate that religious value clashes between pesantren and society do not necessarily lead to social conflict. Instead, both parties tend to develop adaptive mechanisms through dialogue, cooperation, and community participation. *Kiai*, *ustadz*, and community leaders act as mediators who bridge traditional religious values and contemporary social realities. Community activities such as religious gatherings, social services, educational programs, and economic empowerment initiatives provide spaces where differences can be negotiated constructively. From a structural functionalist perspective, these interactions represent a process of social adaptation and integration. Rather than producing disintegration, value differences stimulate communication and institutional adjustment that ultimately reinforce social cohesion. This finding demonstrates that pesantren continue to function as moral institutions capable of maintaining religious authenticity while responding to social transformation.

AGIL Analysis: Reinterpreting Pesantren as an Adaptive Religious Subsystem

The pesantren holds a central role in Indonesia's social structure as both a transmitter of Islamic values and an adaptive institution responding to societal change. Through religious instruction, moral discipline, and the internalization of daily worship, pesantren sustain the normative foundation of community life. However, rather than applying AGIL as a static theoretical model, this article reinterprets the framework through the empirical realities of Indonesian pesantren. The analysis reveals that pesantren function as adaptive religious subsystems that simultaneously preserve religious traditions and facilitate social adaptation. These tensions highlight the complex relationship between tradition and modernization within Indonesian society. These differences often manifest in perceptions of modern education, economic participation, and social behavior, where pesantren emphasize moral discipline and simplicity, whereas local communities are more open to pragmatic and modern lifestyles.⁴⁶ From the perspective of structural functionalism, as articulated by Talcott Parsons, such value clashes can be interpreted as forms of temporary disequilibrium within the broader social system.⁴⁷ Field data indicate that *kiai* and *ustadz* act as cultural mediators, balancing the moral authority of religious education with the pragmatic expectations of local communities.⁴⁸ Their leadership allows pesantren to maintain spiritual legitimacy while engaging with broader social realities, such as economic change and technological advancement.⁴⁹ Moreover, pesantren that open communication channels with community leaders demonstrate greater social integration and less conflict, supporting Parsons' notion of pattern maintenance and adaptation as key to social stability.⁵⁰ Furthermore, the results show that pesantren's involvement in community welfare through charity, disaster relief, and social education strengthens the social bonds that mitigate ideological tensions.⁵¹ From the lens of Talcott Parsons' structural functionalism, such tensions are not symptoms of dysfunction but indicators of the system's dynamic equilibrium. The divergence of values between pesantren and society reflects the functional differentiation within the social structure, where each subsystem performs specific roles that ultimately contribute to systemic stability. Conflict, in this sense, operates as an adaptive mechanism—compelling the social system to recalibrate the balance between pattern maintenance (religious moral order) and adaptation (societal modernization).

Adaptation (A) refers to the ability of a social institution to respond to environmental changes and secure resources necessary for its survival. In the context of contemporary Indonesian society, pesantren face significant challenges arising from globalization, digitalization, economic transformation, and educational competition. Field findings indicate that many pesantren have responded proactively to these

developments. Several institutions have integrated digital literacy programs, entrepreneurship training, foreign language education, vocational courses, and formal educational curricula alongside traditional Islamic learning. These innovations demonstrate that pesantren are not passive institutions resisting modernization but active actors selectively incorporating social change into their educational systems. The adaptation process does not imply abandoning religious values. Instead, modernization is interpreted as a means of strengthening the relevance of Islamic education within contemporary society. These findings challenge assumptions that traditional religious institutions inevitably oppose modernity. Rather, pesantren illustrate how adaptation can occur without sacrificing religious authenticity.

Goal attainment (G) concerns the capacity of social institutions to define and achieve collective objectives. Throughout their historical development, pesantren have maintained a clear educational mission centered on the formation of morally responsible Muslims. Interviews with pesantren leaders indicate that moral education remains the primary institutional objective despite the increasing incorporation of modern educational elements. Religious instruction, character development, discipline, and ethical formation continue to constitute the foundation of pesantren education. This goal orientation distinguishes pesantren from many contemporary educational institutions that prioritize economic achievement alone. While pesantren increasingly prepare students for participation in modern society, they continue to emphasize moral responsibility, religious commitment, and social service as essential educational outcomes. Consequently, goal attainment within pesantren should be understood not merely as academic achievement but as the cultivation of ethical and socially responsible individuals capable of contributing positively to society. These acts embody the functional prerequisites of social systems: adaptation, goal attainment, integration, and latency (AGIL), as outlined by Parsons. By fulfilling these functions, pesantren reinforce social cohesion while maintaining religious authenticity.⁵² This paper introduces a novel application of Parsons' structural functionalism by situating it within the unique socio-religious setting of Indonesian *pesantren*. Unlike previous research that applied the theory mainly to Western social systems, this study demonstrates how *pesantren* function as a moral subsystem maintaining cultural continuity while negotiating modernization pressures. The novelty lies in showing that value clashes between *pesantren* and society are not merely conflicts, but functional mechanisms for social adaptation. These tensions foster dialogue and equilibrium, affirming Parsons' AGIL model in a non-Western religious context. This reinterpretation expands the functionalist framework by proving its relevance to religious education institutions in the Global South a perspective rarely explored in sociological theory.

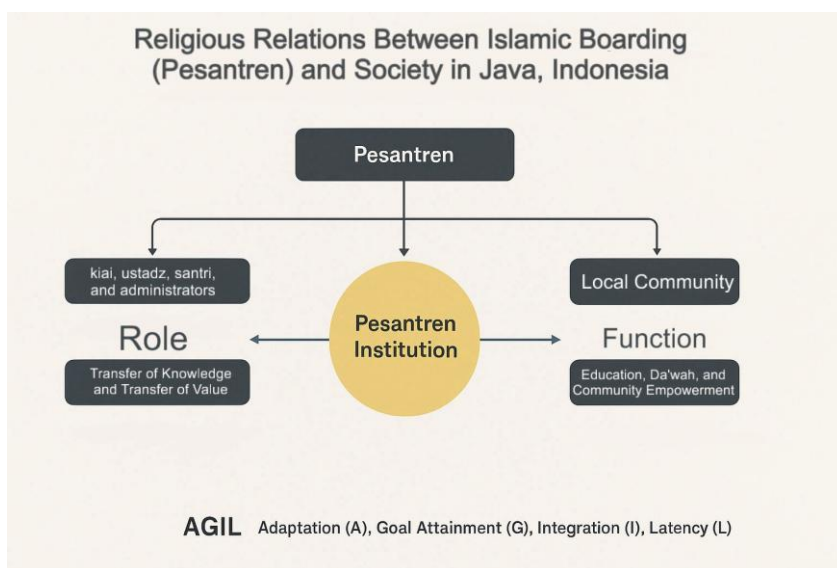


Image: Religious Relation Between Islamic Boarding/Pesantren and Society

Overall, Pesantren maintain distinct value systems that influence their educational philosophy and social roles. Egalitarian pesantren such as Tebuireng, Bahrul Ulum, and Gontor exemplify Parsons' principles of adaptation and integration by combining religious and secular curricula, promoting innovation while preserving moral integrity. In contrast, hierarchical pesantren like Pesulukan Thoriqoh Agung and Al-Falah Ploso embody Parsons' latency function, safeguarding religious continuity through strong leadership and adherence to traditional norms. These institutions accommodate social change by blending religious and secular education, thereby responding to modern societal needs while reinforcing shared values of discipline, cooperation, and morality.⁵³

Integration (I) refers to the coordination of relationships among different social actors and institutions. The findings reveal that integration represents one of the most significant functions performed by pesantren within Indonesian society. Religious value differences between pesantren and surrounding communities occasionally generate tension regarding social behavior, educational expectations, gender relations, and technological change. However, these tensions rarely develop into open conflict because pesantren continuously facilitate dialogue and cooperation with local communities. Kiai function as key agents of integration. Their authority extends beyond religious instruction to include mediation, conflict resolution, community leadership, and social consultation. Through social programs, religious gatherings, educational initiatives, and welfare activities, pesantren establish channels of communication that strengthen social cohesion. The evidence suggests that integration is achieved not by eliminating differences but by creating mechanisms through

which differences can be negotiated constructively. In this respect, pesantren contribute significantly to maintaining social harmony within increasingly plural and dynamic communities. The balance between tradition and progress, demonstrating that pesantren remain vital subsystems sustaining social equilibrium and spiritual resilience in modern Indonesian society. Thus, egalitarian pesantren fulfill a functional role in harmonizing the relationship between tradition and progress.⁵⁴ Conversely, pesantren with more hierarchical or feudal structures such as Pesulukan Thoriqoh Agung and Al-Falah Ploso illustrate Parsons' element of *latency*, which preserves and transmits the cultural and normative patterns essential for moral continuity. The *kiai's* strong authority sustains collective identity and obedience, ensuring the persistence of religious cohesion amid external cultural pressures. Although less adaptive, these pesantren play a stabilizing role by safeguarding the moral and spiritual foundations of society. Together, egalitarian and feudal pesantren demonstrate the dual mechanisms of social balance in Parsons' theory where adaptation to change and preservation of tradition coexist to maintain societal equilibrium.

Latency (L) refers to the maintenance and transmission of cultural patterns across generations. Among the four AGIL functions, latency remains the most distinctive feature of pesantren. Pesantren preserve Islamic traditions through the teaching of classical Islamic texts (*kitab kuning*), communal worship, moral discipline, and the cultivation of religious culture. Daily routines reinforce values such as sincerity, humility, respect for teachers, social responsibility, and devotion to religious learning. These cultural practices ensure the continuity of religious traditions while simultaneously shaping collective identity. The findings indicate that latency should not be interpreted as resistance to change but rather as the preservation of moral foundations necessary for social stability. Through this function, pesantren contribute to the reproduction of Islamic values that continue to influence broader Indonesian Muslim society.⁵⁵

The primary theoretical contribution of this article lies in the reinterpretation of structural functionalism within the socio-religious context of Indonesian pesantren. Previous applications of Parsons' theory have frequently emphasized social stability and institutional order while paying limited attention to the dynamic interaction between tradition and social transformation. Instead, they represent mechanisms of adaptive equilibrium that stimulate institutional adjustment and social negotiation. The empirical findings demonstrate that value differences encourage dialogue, innovation, and institutional adaptation. Rather than threatening social stability, these tensions create opportunities for both pesantren and communities to redefine their relationships and expectations.⁵⁶ Accordingly, this article introduces the concept of the adaptive religious subsystem. This concept refers to a religious institution that maintains cultural continuity while simultaneously responding to changing social

environments. Unlike conventional interpretations of structural functionalism that emphasize equilibrium as a static condition, the adaptive religious subsystem conceptualizes equilibrium as an ongoing process of negotiation between preservation and transformation. Within this framework, pesantren occupy a unique position. They function as institutions of religious preservation while simultaneously acting as agents of social adaptation. Their capacity to perform both roles explains their continuing relevance in contemporary Indonesian society.⁵⁷ This reinterpretation also contributes to broader discussions concerning religion and modernization. Contrary to secularization theories that predict the declining significance of religious institutions, the pesantren case demonstrates how religious organizations can remain socially influential through adaptive engagement with modernity.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that pesantren remain important social institutions that preserve Islamic values while simultaneously adapting to social change. Although differences in religious values between pesantren and society occasionally generate tension, these differences function as mechanisms of adaptation rather than sources of disintegration. Through the active role of kiai, ustadz, santri, and community leaders, value disparities are negotiated through dialogue, education, and social participation. Using Talcott Parsons' structural functionalism, this study shows that pesantren fulfill the AGIL functions of adaptation, goal attainment, integration, and latency. Consequently, pesantren are not merely institutions of religious transmission but also dynamic social factors that contribute to social stability, cultural continuity, and community development in contemporary Indonesia. This study contributes to the reinterpretation of Talcott Parsons' structural functionalism by introducing the concept of pesantren as an adaptive religious subsystem that balances tradition and modernization within Indonesian society. The findings highlight the importance of religious institutions in fostering social cohesion, mediating value differences, and supporting community resilience in the face of contemporary social transformations, and this study is limited to several pesantren in East Java and relies primarily on qualitative data, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings to other regional contexts. Future studies should explore pesantren-community relations in different regions of Indonesia, compare various pesantren models, and examine the impact of digital technology and changing youth cultures on the role of pesantren in contemporary society.

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