

Pesantren and Local Islamic Civilization in South Sumatra: Identity, Resistance, and Glocalization

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Abstract

- Purpose** : This study examines how pesantren in South Sumatra negotiate the pressures of globalization, state educational standardization, and digital transformation while preserving their local Islamic identity and epistemic legitimacy.
- Method** : Using a qualitative historical-sociological design informed by an educational ontology framework, fieldwork was conducted in Palembang, Musi Banyuasin, and Ogan Komering Ilir between 2023 and 2024. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with pesantren leaders, kiai, santri, and alumni, alongside participant observation and archival document analysis
- Results** : Pesantren resilience relies on selective adaptation rather than isolation or total assimilation. Over 60% of institutions studied adopt general curricula and digital technologies while strictly preserving core identity markers, specifically the authority of the kiai and the study of kitab kuning. Furthermore, leadership models are transitioning from purely charismatic authority to hybrid forms that combine religious legitimacy with modern managerial competence.
- Conclusion** : The study conceptualizes pesantren as a "living civilization" that dynamically adapts peripheral practices while keeping core ontological commitments intact. This finding highlights the need for educational policies and accreditation frameworks that safeguard epistemic and cultural diversity while facilitating global engagement, directly aligning with Sustainable Development Goals 4, 10, and 16.

Keywords: Glocalization, Islamic civilization, local identity, pesantren, ulama leadership

1. Introduction

Pesantren are the oldest Islamic educational institutions in the Indonesian archipelago (Nusantara) and remain a central pillar of religious, social and intellectual life in Indonesia, particularly outside Java. In South Sumatra, from large urban institutions such as *Pesantren* Nurul Iman in Palembang to small rural *Pesantren* in Musi Banyuasin and Ogan Komering Ilir, these institutions have long acted as custodians of Islamic scholarship in constant dialogue with local Malay culture (Dhofier, 1999; Majid, 1997). Over recent decades, *Pesantren* have come under growing pressure to adapt to global and national standards of educational quality, curricula and accreditation, standards that frequently overlook the epistemological and cultural specificity of local

Islamic learning traditions (Hefner, 2008). This pressure is not unique to Indonesia. Across the Muslim world, faith-based educational institutions face a structurally similar dilemma: how to meet externally imposed benchmarks of quality and accountability without hollowing out the epistemic and spiritual commitments that give them their institutional identity (Rahmawati et al., 2022). In the Indonesian case, this tension is sharpened by the historical position of *Pesantren* as institutions that predate the modern nation-state, and whose legitimacy has traditionally rested on chains of religious transmission (*sanad*) and *ulama* authority rather than on state accreditation (Azra, 2004).

Three bodies of scholarship inform this study. The first is the historical-sociological literature on *Pesantren* as an institution. Dhofier's (1999) foundational study of the *kyai* established the centrality of charismatic religious authority to *Pesantren* governance, while Majid (1997) offered an insider ethnographic account of *Pesantren* life and its transmission of the *kitab kuning*, the canon of classical Arabic texts that remains the epistemic backbone of traditional Islamic learning (van Bruinessen, 1990). Steenbrink's (1974) historical account of the development of Indonesian Islamic education under colonial and early independence conditions remains one of the few systematic treatments of how *Pesantren*, *madrasah* and state schools diverged institutionally. More recent work extends this line of inquiry into contemporary dynamics of commodification and social class (Hidayah, 2021), leadership succession (Ta'rifin & Halid, 2021; Asy'ari et al., 2017), and the transformation of Islamic higher education institutions under pressure to internationalize (Sibawaihi et al., 2024). The second body of scholarship concerns *Pesantren* and globalization specifically. Azra's (2004) study of translocal *ulama* networks linking the Malay-Indonesian world to Mecca, Medina and Cairo demonstrated that *Pesantren* have never been epistemically isolated; rather, their historical strength has come from selective, negotiated engagement with wider Islamic scholarly networks. Lukens-Bull's (2005) ethnographic account of modernity and tradition in Muslim Java similarly shows that *Pesantren* have long practised what might be called strategic accommodation rather than either full assimilation to state models or defensive isolation.

The third body of scholarship provides the theoretical vocabulary used in this article: the sociology of globalization and, specifically, the concept of glocalization. Robertson (1995) argued that globalization should not be understood as a homogenizing force imposed on passive localities, but as a dual process in which the universal is particularized and the particular is, in turn, projected onto the global stage; Roudometof (2016) subsequently developed this into a more systematic analytical framework distinguishing glocalization from simple hybridity or cultural mixing. Applied to religious education, glocalization helps explain why institutions such as *Pesantren* can adopt globally circulating managerial and pedagogical technologies without necessarily losing their distinctive local-religious character (Rahmawati et al., 2022; Sibawaihi et al., 2024). This study further draws on the educational ontology framework proposed by Gibson and Bengtsen (2024), which distinguishes between the core ontological commitments of an educational tradition and its more contingent institutional forms, providing an analytical language for separating what a *Pesantren* must preserve from what it may safely adapt. Finally, to conceptualize *Pesantren* as an evolving yet continuous social formation, the article draws on Ibn Khaldun's classical notion of *hadharah* (civilization) as an integrated system of social, intellectual and spiritual life, in dialogue with critical perspectives on situated and partial knowledge (Haraway, 2013) and with Adorno's (2014) caution against treating any tradition, including a critical one, as a closed and finished system.

Despite this substantial literature, three gaps remain. First, most empirical studies of *Pesantren* resilience and globalization focus on Java, where the institutional density of *Pesantren* and the volume of scholarly attention are both far greater than in the Outer Islands; South Sumatra, despite hosting significant urban and rural *Pesantren* populations, remains comparatively understudied (Dhofier, 1999; Hidayah, 2021). Second, existing studies tend to examine *Pesantren* responses to globalization either historically (colonial-era resistance) or contemporaneously (digital transformation), rarely tracing the same institutions or region across multiple historical periods within a single analytical frame. Third, while the concept of glocalization has been applied productively to Islamic higher education institutions (Sibawaihi et al., 2024), it has been used less often, and less systematically, to interpret the everyday, lower-level institutional adaptations of traditional *Pesantren*, and rarely in combination with an explicit educational ontology framework capable of distinguishing core from peripheral identity elements.

This study addresses these gaps through three research questions: (1) How have *Pesantren* in South Sumatra responded to successive waves of external pressure, from Dutch colonial education policy through New Order modernization to Reform-era digital globalization? (2) How do patterns of *ulama* and *kiai* leadership mediate these responses? (3) What theoretical vocabulary can capture *Pesantren* resilience in a way that avoids both the assumption of passive homogenization and the romanticization of static tradition? In pursuing these questions, the study aims to develop and illustrate the concept of *Pesantren* as a living civilization, and to draw out its implications for education policy.

This matters to society well beyond the *Pesantren* community itself. Debates about reconciling educational standardization with cultural and religious diversity are relevant wherever minority, faith-based or indigenous knowledge systems interact with state education policy. Understanding how South Sumatran *Pesantren* have negotiated colonial rule, national modernization and, more recently, digital globalization offers a concrete, transferable case of how a local institution can remain legitimate without capitulating to homogenizing pressure or retreating into isolation. The societal value of this research is threefold. First, it contributes to safeguarding intangible cultural and religious heritage: *Pesantren* carry centuries of Malay-Islamic scholarship, transregional *ulama* networks and locally rooted pedagogical practices (*sorogan*, *bandongan*, *halaqah*) that risk erosion if policy assumes that "modern" necessarily means "standardized" (Azra, 2004; van Bruinessen, 1990). Second, the study speaks directly to Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education) by showing that educational quality can be pursued through negotiated, context-sensitive pathways rather than uniform models (UNESCO, 2015), and to Goal 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions) by illustrating how religious authority structures mediate between community and state without generating conflict. It also bears on Goal 10 (Reduced Inequalities), since *Pesantren* outside Java, and rural *Pesantren* in particular, have historically received far less academic and policy attention than their Javanese counterparts, reinforcing a centre-periphery imbalance in how Indonesian Islamic education is studied and resourced (United Nations, 2015; Dhofier, 1999; Hefner, 2008).

Third, and most directly, the concept proposed here, *Pesantren* as a living civilization, offers education authorities, religious organizations and *Pesantren* leaders a vocabulary for distinguishing between essential elements of institutional identity that must be protected (the authority of the *kiai*, transmission of the *kitab kuning*, character formation) and peripheral elements that can be adapted

(management structures, digital platforms, pedagogical techniques). This distinction has practical value for policymakers designing accreditation frameworks, for organizations supporting *Pesantren* digitalization, and for *Pesantren* leaders planning generational succession. The author's continuing engagement with *Pesantren* communities in South Sumatra, through Universitas Al-Qur'an Ittifaqiah Indralaya, aims to translate these findings into practical guidance for institutions facing similar pressures and to extend this research to a wider, more geographically diverse sample of *Pesantren*.

2. Method

Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative, descriptive-analytical, historical-sociological design, treating the *Pesantren* not only as an educational institution but as a social phenomenon embedded in a specific historical trajectory. This design combines two complementary logics: a historical logic, which reconstructs institutional responses to external pressure across three periods (colonial, New Order and Reform era), and a sociological logic, which examines contemporary patterns of leadership, pedagogy and identity negotiation. The combination follows established practice in qualitative case-study research, in which multiple sources of evidence are triangulated to build an analytically generalizable, if not statistically generalizable, account of a bounded social phenomenon (Yin, 2018).

Research Setting and Timeframe

Fieldwork was carried out in South Sumatra, Indonesia, focusing on *Pesantren* in three locations: Palembang (the provincial capital, home to large, long-established urban *Pesantren*), Musi Banyuasin (a peri-urban and rural regency), and Ogan Komering Ilir (a predominantly rural regency). These three locations were selected purposively to capture variation in urbanization, institutional scale and historical founding period. Data collection took place between 2023 and 2024.

Participants and Sampling

Informants were selected purposively to ensure representation across three institutional types identified in the field: *salaf* (traditional), modern and semi-modern *Pesantren*. Within each institution, the study sought to interview individuals occupying different structural positions, so that institutional narratives could be cross-checked from multiple vantage points: *Pesantren* directors and founders (or their successors), senior *kiai* and religious teachers (*ustadz*), current *santri* (students), and alumni who had left the *Pesantren* for further study or employment. This purposive, maximum-variation sampling strategy is consistent with qualitative case-study conventions, which prioritize information richness over statistical representativeness (Yin, 2018).

Data Collection Procedures

Data were collected through three complementary techniques. First, semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted with *Pesantren* directors, senior *kiai*, *santri* and alumni, focusing on institutional history, curricular change, leadership succession and personal experiences of negotiating tradition and modern demands. Second, participant observation was conducted of teaching and communal life within the *Pesantren*, including classroom instruction (both *kitab kuning* recitation and general-subject teaching), daily religious routines, and organizational meetings, allowing the researcher to observe practices that informants did not always articulate explicitly in interviews. Third, documentary analysis was conducted of institutional archives, curricula,

accreditation documents and relevant local historical literature, providing a source of evidence independent of informants' present-day recollections and a check against retrospective bias.

Data Analysis Procedures

Data analysis combined thematic analysis with the educational ontology framework proposed by Gibson and Bengtson (2024), following an inductive-deductive logic: themes were first identified inductively from fieldwork material, using open and then focused coding of interview transcripts, observation notes and documents, and were then interpreted deductively against the theoretical framework, which distinguishes core ontological commitments of an educational tradition from more contingent institutional or pedagogical forms. This two-stage procedure allowed the analysis to remain grounded in what informants and documents actually said, while also generating a structured, theoretically informed account of which elements of *Pesantren* identity were treated by informants as non-negotiable and which were treated as adaptable.

Trustworthiness and Rigor

Credibility was strengthened through triangulation of sources (interviews, observation and documents) and methods, and through review of the findings by key informants, a form of member checking intended to confirm that the researcher's interpretation of institutional narratives was recognizable to the people who had provided them (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Dependability was supported by maintaining detailed field notes and an audit trail linking coded themes back to specific interview and observation records, while transferability, rather than statistical generalizability, was pursued by describing the three research sites and their institutional variation in sufficient depth that readers can judge the applicability of the findings to other, comparable settings (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Ethical Considerations

All participants took part voluntarily and provided informed consent prior to interviews and observation. Anonymity and confidentiality of informants were preserved throughout data collection, analysis and reporting, in line with the research ethics guidelines of Universitas Al-Qur'an Ittifaqiah Indralaya. Institutional names are reported where they are already a matter of public record (e.g., well-known urban *Pesantren*), but individual informants are not identified by name, and quotations attributed to specific roles (director, *kiai*, *santri*, *alumnus*) rather than to named individuals.

This design is intended to be transferable to other settings in which faith-based or community-rooted educational institutions face similar pressures from state standardization and globalization. The combination of historical vignettes, leadership analysis and an explicit ontological framework provides a replicable template for researchers and practitioners documenting how local institutions negotiate, rather than simply resist or surrender to, external pressures for change.

3. Result

Historical Vignettes: Colonial Period, New Order and Reform Era

During the late colonial period, *Pesantren* in South Sumatra functioned as sites of epistemological resistance. While Dutch colonial education classified Western knowledge as modern and superior, Palembang's *Pesantren*, embedded in translocal ulama networks stretching from Mecca to Hadhramaut, sustained an alternative source of authority and legitimacy independent of the colonial state (Azra, 2004; Steenbrink, 1974). This resistance was not primarily

organizational or political but epistemological: *Pesantren* continued to validate knowledge through chains of transmission (*isnad*) rooted in centuries-old scholarly networks, rather than through the credentialing structures the colonial administration sought to impose. The documentary evidence examined in this study, together with informants' accounts of institutional founding narratives, indicates that this period established a template, later reactivated in subsequent eras, in which *Pesantren* legitimacy could be sustained through external scholarly networks even when local state recognition was withheld or actively hostile.

During the New Order (1966-1998), state modernization pressures produced three distinct institutional responses among the *Pesantren* studied. The first response, full modernization, was chiefly observed among urban Palembang *Pesantren*, which adopted national curricula and formal madrasa structures, integrating general subjects alongside religious instruction and pursuing formal government recognition. The second response, strict traditionalism, was observed among rural *salaf Pesantren* that rejected state recognition, maintaining an exclusively classical curriculum centred on *kitab kuning* recitation through *sorogan* and *bandongan* methods and declining to adopt the formal administrative apparatus associated with state accreditation. The third response, and the most common among the *Pesantren* studied, comprising more than 60% of the institutions examined, was selective adaptation, in which modern elements, such as formal classroom structures, general-subject instruction, or administrative record-keeping, were adopted while core traditional practices, particularly the authority of the *kiai* and the centrality of *kitab kuning* study, were preserved intact.

Since the 1998 Reform era, religious authority has fragmented further. About 78% of santri interviewed now regularly access religious content from outside the *Pesantren*, including transnational sources such as satellite broadcasts, social media preachers and online fatwa services, a pattern that decentres the *Pesantren* as the sole or primary gatekeeper of religious knowledge for its own students. At the same time, hybrid identities and "digital *Pesantren*" practices, including online classes, digital *kitab kuning* libraries and mobile discussion forums, represent a further reinvention of the tradition through new media rather than a simple displacement of it. Informants in modern and semi-modern *Pesantren* described these digital tools less as a threat to traditional authority and more as an extension of existing pedagogical practices, such as *bandongan* group recitation, into new technological formats, provided that the figure of the *kiai* remained the ultimate interpretive authority over content encountered online.

Leadership Patterns and Summary of Findings

Leadership patterns mirror this negotiated change. Purely charismatic leadership, grounded in religious legitimacy and chains of transmission, predominates in *Pesantren salaf* led by senior *kiai*, consistent with classical accounts of *kiai* authority as resting on personal piety, scholarly lineage and perceived spiritual grace (*karamah*) rather than on formal institutional office (Dhofier, 1999; Ta'rifin & Halid, 2021). A hybrid leadership model, combining religious legitimacy with modern managerial competence, is emerging among successors with higher education, a pattern that parallels findings from studies of *kiai* succession elsewhere in Indonesia, which likewise report that formalized institutional structures tend to make *Pesantren* leadership more resilient to succession crises, even as they can attenuate the direct personal bond between *kiai* and santri (Asy'ari et al., 2017; Ta'rifin & Halid, 2021). Hybrid leadership improves adaptability but places new strains on maintaining

santri loyalty and community trust, since the managerial competencies that make a successor an effective administrator are not always the competencies, or the personal qualities, on which *kiai* charisma has traditionally rested.

Table 1 summarizes the three historical vignettes and the associated leadership pattern, organized according to the core-peripheral distinction derived from the educational ontology framework (Gibson & Bengtsen, 2024): elements treated by informants as non-negotiable core identity, and elements treated as adaptable periphery.

Table 1. Historical Trajectories of Pesantren Institutional Responses and Leadership Patterns

Period / Theme	Dominant institutional response	Core identity preserved	Peripheral elements adapted
Colonial period (pre-1945)	Epistemological resistance via translocal ulama networks (Mecca, Hadhramaut)	Chains of scholarly transmission (isnad); independent religious legitimacy	None substantial; state schooling largely rejected
New Order (1966-1998)	Three patterns: full modernization (urban); strict traditionalism (rural salaf); selective adaptation (>60% of cases)	Kiai authority; kitab kuning curriculum	National curriculum; formal madrasa structures; administrative record-keeping
Reform era (1998-present)	Fragmentation of religious authority; rise of “digital pesantren”	Kiai as final interpretive authority; kitab kuning as reference text	Online classes; digital kitab kuning libraries; mobile discussion forums
Leadership	Shift from purely charismatic to hybrid (charismatic + managerial) leadership among successors	Religious legitimacy and lineage of transmission	Managerial competence; formal educational credentials of successors

Source: Author’s analysis based on fieldwork data (2023–2024) and the educational ontology framework.

Read together, the three vignettes and the leadership analysis indicate that *Pesantren* resilience in South Sumatra has consistently taken the form of selective, negotiated adaptation rather than either uniform modernization or static preservation, a pattern elaborated theoretically in the remainder of this section.

4. Discussion

Glocalization Rather than Isolation or Capitulation

Taken together, the vignettes indicate that *Pesantren* resilience is not a matter of resisting globalization outright, nor of embracing it wholesale, but of glocalization: appropriating global elements while promoting local knowledge in global arenas, historically evident in the transregional *ulama* networks linking Palembang to Mecca and Cairo (Azra, 2004). This reading is consistent with Robertson's (1995) foundational argument that globalization and localization are not opposed processes but two faces of a single dynamic, in which the global is always instantiated through local particularization, and with Roudometof's (2016) subsequent refinement of glocalization as an analytically distinct process from simple cultural hybridity. The South Sumatran evidence extends

this argument from the domain of consumer culture and transnational institutions, where glocalization theory has most often been applied (see, e.g., Sibawaihi et al., 2024, on Islamic higher education institutions), to the more intimate, small-scale setting of a village or urban *Pesantren* negotiating a national curriculum, a smartphone, or a returning alumnus with a university degree.

Pesantren as a Living Civilization and Theoretical Contributions

The study synthesizes these findings in the concept of *Pesantren* as a living civilization, drawing on Ibn Khaldun's notion of *hadharah* as an integrated system of social, intellectual and spiritual life rather than a narrowly defined educational institution. Unlike a static "museum civilization", a living civilization evolves while retaining continuity, a pattern evident across all three historical periods examined: colonial-era epistemological resistance, New Order selective adaptation, and Reform-era digital reinvention each represent a different surface expression of the same underlying commitment to *kiai* authority and *kitab kuning* transmission. This framing resists two opposite temptations in the literature: the temptation to treat *Pesantren* survival as evidence of successful resistance to modernity as such, and the temptation to treat *Pesantren* adaptation as evidence of gradual convergence toward a single global model of formal schooling. Haraway's (2013) insistence on situated, partial knowledge is useful here: the *Pesantren*'s epistemic authority has never claimed to be universal in the way that colonial or national curricula claimed universality, but has instead operated as a legitimate, situated knowledge system whose validity does not depend on displacing or being displaced by other systems. Adorno's (2014) caution against treating any tradition, including a critical one, as a finished and closed totality similarly supports reading *Pesantren* identity as a living, argued-over practice rather than a fixed inheritance.

This study makes three theoretical contributions. First, it extends the application of glocalization theory (Robertson, 1995; Roudometof, 2016) to a religious-educational institution operating substantially below the level of the nation-state or the transnational university, showing that the same conceptual apparatus developed for large-scale institutional transformation (Sibawaihi et al., 2024) can illuminate small-scale, everyday negotiations of curriculum and technology in a rural *Pesantren*. Second, it operationalizes the educational ontology framework of Gibson and Bengtsen (2024) as an empirical, rather than purely conceptual, tool, using it to code fieldwork data into core and peripheral identity elements, a methodological move that could be replicated in studies of other faith-based or indigenous educational institutions. Third, it proposes *Pesantren* as a living civilization as a middle-range concept, more specific than "resilience" or "adaptation" in general, and more empirically grounded than an abstract application of Ibn Khaldun's *hadharah*, that can travel to comparative studies of other traditional religious education systems facing similar pressures, such as the *madrasah* systems discussed by Hefner (2008) or the Islamic higher education institutions examined by Sibawaihi et al. (2024).

Policy Implications and Comparison with Prior Studies

The main policy implication is a distinction between a uniform "global *Pesantren*", standardized to international benchmarks at the cost of its distinctive epistemology, and a "*Pesantren*-world", rooted in specific local contexts such as Palembang, Musi Banyuasin and Ogan Komering Ilir yet connected to global educational conversations (Gibson & Bengtsen, 2024). National and provincial education authorities designing accreditation and curriculum-integration policies for *Pesantren* should avoid one-size-fits-all standardization and instead support institutions

in identifying and protecting their essential identity markers while adapting peripheral practices. This recommendation aligns directly with the Incheon Declaration's emphasis on inclusive and equitable quality education that respects cultural, linguistic and religious diversity in its pursuit of Sustainable Development Goal 4 (UNESCO, 2015), with Goal 16's emphasis on responsive, inclusive and representative institutions (United Nations, 2015), and with Goal 10's concern for reducing inequalities between regions and population groups, given the historic under-resourcing of Outer Island *Pesantren* relative to their Javanese counterparts (Dhofier, 1999; Hidayah, 2021).

The finding that selective adaptation, rather than full modernization or strict traditionalism, is the modal institutional response corroborates similar typologies reported in broader reviews of Indonesian *Pesantren* development, which likewise distinguish *salaf*, modern and integrated institutional types (Hidayah, 2021). The leadership findings are consistent with, and extend, prior studies of *kiai* succession, which report that *pesantren* combining charismatic religious authority with formalized institutional structures tend to be more resilient across leadership transitions than those relying on charisma alone (Asy'ari et al., 2017; Ta'rifin & Halid, 2021). At the same time, the South Sumatran case differs from much of the existing literature, which is concentrated on Java, in one respect: because South Sumatran *Pesantren* have historically received comparatively less state and academic attention, several informants described selective adaptation less as a response to intensive state pressure and more as a pragmatic, community-driven strategy to remain relevant to *santri* and parents facing an increasingly competitive religious and educational marketplace, a dynamic also noted in studies of religious commodification in urban, middle-class *Pesantren* contexts (Hidayah, 2021).

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

This study has several limitations that should temper the interpretation of its findings. The purposive, three-regency sample, while sufficient to identify recurring institutional patterns, is not statistically representative of *Pesantren* across South Sumatra or Indonesia more broadly, and the findings are analytically, rather than statistically, generalizable. The historical vignettes rely partly on retrospective accounts and documentary reconstruction, which are subject to the ordinary limitations of oral history and institutional memory, even where triangulated against archival material. Finally, because fieldwork spanned a single two-year window, the study captures a synchronic cross-section of institutions at different points in a longer historical trajectory rather than a genuinely longitudinal record of change within the same institutions over time.

Future research should extend this analysis to a wider and more remote sample of rural *Pesantren*, incorporate gender dimensions of leadership, given that women's leadership roles within *Pesantren*, including as *nyai* (female religious teachers and, in some cases, institutional co-leaders), were only partially captured in the present sample, and adopt longitudinal methods to track how the balance between preservation and adaptation evolves over time, including how the current generation of digitally fluent *santri* may reshape *kiai* authority as they themselves assume leadership roles.

5. Conclusion

This study has shown that *Pesantren* in South Sumatra have negotiated more than a century of external pressure, from Dutch colonial education policy through New Order modernization to

Reform-era digital globalization, not through isolation or wholesale assimilation but through a sustained pattern of glocalization: preserving core elements of institutional identity, above all the authority of the *kiai* and the transmission of the *kitab kuning*, while selectively adapting peripheral elements of pedagogy, organization and technology. Framed through the concept of *Pesantren* as a living civilization, this pattern offers both a corrective to accounts that treat religious educational traditions as either doomed to homogenization or condemned to irrelevance through rigidity, and a practical vocabulary for policymakers, religious organizations and *Pesantren* leaders seeking to support educational quality without erasing epistemic diversity. Extending this analysis to a broader, more geographically diverse and longitudinal sample of *Pesantren* remains an important task for future research and for the author's continuing engagement with *Pesantren* communities in South Sumatra.

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