

## ***Ngabulâ Vis-À-Vis* Modernity: Tabarruk Practice in Bangkalan Pesantren**

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### **Abstract**

*Ngabulâ* is a tradition practiced by some santris in Bangkalan pesantrens in order to seek blessings (*tabarruk*) by serving the kiai. Those santris are called *kabulâ* or *khaddam*. In fact, *ngabulâ* is very important for kiai's life and also the pesantren in Bangkalan, but unfortunately the study of it is still rarely done. Therefore, this research aims to explore several things: the meaning of *ngabulâ* in Bangkalan pesantren according to the actors and the dynamic of *ngabulâ* in Bangkalan pesantren based on the continuity and change theory conceptualized by John Obert Voll. This research was conducted in some pesantrens in Bangkalan from early 2019 to mid-2020, and the data was collected through interviews, observation, and documentation. This research used the paradigm of social definition by applying phenomenology. The theory used is continuity and change conceptualized by John Obert Voll in observing the resurgence of Islam in the modern world. This research concludes some facts: *first*, this study finds that *ngabulâ* for the actors involved in it (the *kabulâ*, kiai and their families, and the *kabulâ*'s parents) means respect, dedication, learning media, and a source of blessings. *Second*, there is continuity and change in the *ngabulâ*,



especially in the motives, goals, and forms of *ngabulâ*. To observe the continuity and change of it, the researcher uses the basic styles of action conceptualized by Voll with modification and addition, namely: adaptation, authority of the text, conservative actions, and charisma. In addition to this research, the researcher added one thing, i.e. generous manner of the kiai.

[*Ngabulâ* adalah sebuah tradisi yang dipraktikkan oleh beberapa santri di pesantren Bangkalan dalam rangka mencari berkah dengan jalan melayani kiai. Mereka mempunyai sebutan *kabulâ* atau *khaddam*. Faktanya, tradisi *ngabulâ* sangatlah penting untuk kehidupan kiai maupun keberlangsungan pesantren di Bangkalan. Namun sayangnya penelitian mengenai hal ini masih sangat jarang dilakukan. Untuk itu, penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi beberapa hal: makna *ngabulâ* di pesantren Bangkalan bagi para aktor yang terlibat di dalamnya, dan dinamika *ngabulâ* di pesantren Bangkalan berdasarkan teori Continuity and Change yang dikonsepsikan oleh John Obert Voll. Riset ini dilakukan di Bangkalan sejak awal 2019 hingga pertengahan 2020, dan data diperoleh dari wawancara, observasi, dan dokumentasi. Riset ini menggunakan paradigma definisi sosial dengan menerapkan fenomenologi. Adapun teori yang digunakan adalah Continuity and Change yang dikonsepsikan oleh John Obert Voll dalam memandang kebangkitan Islam di dunia modern. Penelitian ini menemukan beberapa fakta: pertama, studi ini menemukan bahwa *ngabulâ* bagi aktor yang terlibat di dalamnya (para *kabulâ*, kiai dan keluarganya, dan orang tua *kabulâ*) bermakna penghormatan, pengabdian, media pembelajaran, dan sumber keberkahan. Kedua, ada keberlangsungan dan perubahan dalam tradisi *ngabulâ* terutama dalam motif, tujuan, dan bentuk tradisi *ngabulâ*. Untuk mengobservasi keberlangsungan dan perubahannya, peneliti menggunakan empat bentuk dasar dalam tindakan yang dikonsepsikan oleh Voll dengan modifikasi dan tambahan, yaitu: adaptasionis, otoritas teks, tindakan konservatif, dan karisma. Adapun tambahan dari peneliti untuk tindakan ini berdasar hasil di lapangan, yaitu perlakuan baik dari kiai.]

Keywords: *ngabulâ*; modernity; *tabarruk*; continuity and change.

## Introduction

As we know, Madurese society's culture has a very strong spiritualism in Islamic religion, almost of the Madurese society's has a



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lot of believes in spiritual and blessings perspectives and nuances, such as the Kiai. In Madurese culture, Kiais occupy a very respectable position. Madurese who are fanatical about Islam since the beginning of Islamization, pay great respect to the *kiai*. So in the pyramid of social stratification of the Madurese community, *kiai* occupies the highest position or top elite, even above respect for the government.<sup>1</sup> Due to this high position, many people want to dedicate themselves to the figure of a *kiai* for *tabarruk* (to seek *Baraka* or blessings) with his intermediary. In the Madurese tradition, the practice of serving the life of a *kiai* is called *ngabulâ*, which means serving or being a servant.<sup>2</sup> The *santris* who practice *ngabulâ* are called *kabulâ*, *kabulâ'ân*, and *khaddam*.

*Ngabulâ* is not a new tradition, but has accompanied the history of the establishment of ancient pesantren in Madura. Many historical books record that Kiai Hasyim Asy'ari used to serve Syaikhona Mohammad Kholil in Bangkalan.<sup>3</sup> Syaikhona Kholil is well known as a person who had the qualities of guardianship and *karamah* (miracle). With this *karamah*, it further encourages people to pay respect and seek blessings from him, even until the *kiai* died.<sup>4</sup> *Kiai's* role is very dominant to his *santri*. It can be seen from the *santri's* obedience. *Sami'na wa athâ'na* is the most popular term in pesantren, means we hear and we obey, to the everything ordered by *Kiai*. They always think every command is the right way to be carried out. Whatever a *Kiai* says, it must be accepted obediently since it was seen as absolute rightness.<sup>5</sup> The students believed that by *tabarruk* to the *kiai*, the knowledge they learned would be useful along with the *kiai's* blessing for them. The education pattern of the pesantren, especially the salaf pesantren, places

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<sup>1</sup> Abdur Rozaki, *Islam, Oligarki Politik dan Perlawanan Sosial* (Yogyakarta: Pasca Sarjana UIN Sunan Kalijaga, 2016), 61.

<sup>2</sup> Muhri Mohtar, *Kamus Madura-Indonesia Kontemporer* (Bangkalan: Yayasan Arraudlah, 2016), 98.

<sup>3</sup> Ronald Lukens-Bull, *A Peaceful Jihad: Negotiating Identity and Modernity in Muslim Java* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 27.

<sup>4</sup> Abdurrahman Mas'ud, *Dari Haramain ke Nusantara: Jejak Intelektual Arsitek Pesantren* (Jakarta: Kencana, 2006), 194.

<sup>5</sup> Zainuddin Syarif and Abdul Gaffar, "Sketch Out the Myth of Wisdom and Blessing of Islamic Boarding School," *Ijtima'iyya: Journal of Muslim Society Research*, 4, no. 2 (September 2019): 158.



the santri as student figures, as well as servants. This pattern is known as *talmadzah*, which describes the domination of kiai influence and the demands of students to be passive.<sup>6</sup>

The relationship between the *baraka* holder and receiver occurs through closeness, through contact. In this research, kiai is assumed as the *baraka* holder, and the *kabulâ* is the receiver. The *Baraka* phenomenon thus comes continuously through experiences about what *baraka* means as a symbol of closeness that gives prosperity.<sup>7</sup> The concept of *baraka* (divine blessing) is one of the concepts considered important by Islam for human prosperity. This is perhaps the reason why this concept and its derivatives have been mentioned many times in the Holy Qur'an. It can be said that *baraka* is an increase in the quality and quantity of God's blessings through ways that are not visible to humans. This is actually an invisible blessing which manifests itself as a material incalculable increase covering all human affairs. The word *baraka* also means to make happiness constant and permanent, which also means its abundance and continuity. However, with modernity, barakah has become a strange concept in modern human life.<sup>8</sup>

The research about *ngabulâ* tradition or santri *kabulâ* has been conducted several times. One of them is the research conducted by Supandi, using the term "*khadam*". In the article, *khadam* was viewed from the professionalism of the job as a low-educated person who has no competence, so that the activities they do are lower-class profession. In other case, the *khadam* also has the privilege of being close to the kiai, so that those who want to visit kiai must go through them first. This research used structural functionalism theory, and concluded that the

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<sup>6</sup> Fera Andriani Djakfar, "Tabarruk dan Barakah dalam Berbagai Perspektif," *Syaikhuna: Jurnal Pendidikan dan Pranata Islam* 11, no. 2 (October 2020): 253, doi: 10.36835/syaikhuna.v11i2.3929.

<sup>7</sup> Dietrich Von Denffer, "Baraka as Basic Concept of Muslim Popular Belief?," *Islamic Studies* 15, no. 3 (1976): 180, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20847004>.

<sup>8</sup> Serdar Demirel and Hikmatullah Babu Sahib, "Concept of *Barakah* in Qur'an and Sunnah: Toward its Realization in Modern Discourse," *FSM Scholarly Studies: Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* n.v., no. 5 (2005): 262.



existence of *khadam* in pesantren was very important, especially for the kiai's family's domestic activities. Supandi also stated that being a *khadam* was an alternative for underprivileged students to keep studying at the pesantren.<sup>9</sup>

Another next research was used the term *ngabulâ*, the same as the terms in this research. However, the research conducted by Abdul Mu'in and Mohammad Hefni interpreted the *ngabulâ* tradition as a community tradition or custom carried out by the prospective bride before her wedding by serving as a servant (*kabulâ*) at the kiai's house, with a duration of only about a week before the wedding. The research was conducted in Akkor Village, Palengaan District, Pamekasan Regency.<sup>10</sup>

In those studies above, *kabulâ* or *khadam* are often referred to as santri or students from low economic level, so that economic factors can be said to be the main motive for serving. The practice of *ngabulâ* that had been discussed was limited to doing ordinary household chores such as cooking, washing and so on. However, this is not the same case with the tradition of *ngabulâ* in Bangkalan in this study. The economic motive is assumed to be just one of the many other motives in the *ngabulâ* tradition in Bangkalan. Likewise in the form of the practice of *ngabulâ*, in this modern era it is assumed to have developed and expanded. This assumption is reinforced by the data on the number of *kabulâ* who still have kinship ties with the kiai family, many of whom still pay the cost of the pesantren, and even often visit the kiai for *nyabis*.<sup>11</sup>

Nowadays in a modern era transition, the tradition of *ngabulâ* as a practice of seeking blessings which is still ongoing in almost all boarding schools in Bangkalan is assumed to have changed in several

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<sup>9</sup> Supandi, "Dinamika Sosio-Kultural Keagamaan Masyarakat Madura: Kiprah dan Eksistensi *Khadam* dalam Pesantren di Madura," *Jurnal Penelitian dan Pemikiran Keislaman UIM* 4, no. 1 (2017): 26-42.

<sup>10</sup> Abdul Mu'in and Mohammad Hefni, "Tradisi *Ngabulâ* di Madura (Sebuah Upaya Membentuk Keluarga Sakinah bagi Pasangan Muda)," *Karsa: Jurnal Sosial dan Budaya Keislaman* 24, no. 1 (June, 2016): 114.

<sup>11</sup> *Nyabis* in the Bangkalan pesantren tradition means visiting or meeting the kiai, generally by shaking hands and giving money or something to kiai.



ways. This change was assumed to be due to the fact that today's pesantren have started to come into contact with modernity<sup>12</sup> through the modernization proces.<sup>13</sup>

Modernity in the context of pesantren's perspectives, for example by responding to the modernization of education and socio-economic changes in various ways, namely: *Firstly*, renewal the educational content of the pesantren by adding formal subjects (not only religious lessons); *secondly*, renewal in terms of teaching methodology by applying classical systems; *thirdly*, the renewal of functions not only in education, but also includes socio-economic functions; *fourthly*, reforms in the institutional structure, for example in the form of pesantren leadership.<sup>14</sup> The addition of formal schools to the Bangkalan pesantren as a response to modernity has contributed to a change in this tradition.

Of course this article is different from previous research, it focuses on the meaning of the *ngabulâ* tradition in Bangkalan for the actors involved, namely for the *kabulâs* as the main actors who carry out the tradition, for the kiai and their families who use their services, and for parents of the *kabulâ* as the closest person to the *kabulâ*. This paper

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<sup>12</sup> Modernity has indeed spread to most of the world, but has not given rise to a single new civilization, or a new institutional pattern, but more to the development of some patterns of modern civilization. Even societies or civilizations that have common characteristics within one family tend to develop differently ideologically and institutionally. S.N. Eisenstadt, "Social Evolution and Modernity: Some Observations on Parsons's Comparative and Evolutionary Analysis: Parsons's Analysis from the Perspective of Multiple Modernities," *The American Sociologist* 35, no. 4 (Desember, 2004): 7.

<sup>13</sup> Modernization cannot be separated from an important event, namely in 1947, the Secretary of State of the United States named George C. Marshall gave a speech at Harvard University. He sparked the idea of the US government to help restore allied countries in Europe that suffered from World War II to revive and grow their economies. This became known as The Marshall Plan. Melvyn P. Leffler "The United States and the Strategic Dimensions of the Marshall Plan," *Diplomatic History* 12, no. 3 (1988): 277–306.

<sup>14</sup> Azyumardi Azra, *Pendidikan Islam: Tradisi dan Modernisasi di Tengah Tantangan Milenium III* (Jakarta: Kencana Prenadamedia Grup, 2012), 128.



also explores the continuity and changes of the *ngabulâ* tradition in Bangkalan Islamic boarding schools in the modern era and what aspects have influenced it.

## **Methods**

This research is qualitative research, chosen because of the researcher's need to explore an issue and problem. This is inseparable from the need for researchers to study a certain concept, a specific group or population, identify variables that are not easy to calculate with numbers, and listen to faint or quiet voices in a community. In this case, it is about the tradition of *ngabulâ vis-à-vis* modernity in the context of seeking *baraka* in Bangkalan Islamic boarding schools. In addition, researchers also want to empower these *Kabulâ* individuals to be able to tell their life stories, pay attention to their opinions, to be written flexibly without being confined by a rigid academic writing structure.<sup>15</sup>

This research was conducted in Bangkalan by taking data from some pesantrens. The *kabulâs* interviewed in this study came from various pesantrens in Bangkalan Regency. Researcher took several research subjects from various pesantrens based on regions, namely urban and rural areas, based on the age of the pesantren, namely old and new pesantren, and based on the number of students, namely large and small pesantren.<sup>16</sup> Bangkalan was chosen as a place to do research

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<sup>15</sup> John. W. Cresswel, *Penelitian Kualitatif dan Desain Riset: Memilih di Antara Lima Pendekatan*, trans. Ahmad Lintang Lazuardi (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2015), 64.

<sup>16</sup> The classification and typology of pesantren used in this study is guided by the regulations issued by the Ministry of Religion of the Republic of Indonesia. Among them are PMA number 18 of 2014 which was downloaded from the official website of the Bureau of Law and Foreign Cooperation of the Ministry of Religion of the Republic of Indonesia, <https://hkln.kemenag.go.id/e-regulasi.php?search=true&idCat=&nomor=18&tahun=2014> & about = pesantren accessed on 30 October 2020, <http://pendis.kemenag.go.id/file/dokumen/pontrenanalysis.pdf> accessed on 30 October 2020, and from the Islamic Education Statistics Book issued by the Directorate General of Islamic Education of the Ministry Religion 2014-2015 as quoted by Ali Maulida, "Dinamika dan Peran Pondok Pesantren dalam Pendidikan Islam Sejak Era Kolonialisme Hingga Masa Kini," *Edukasi Islami: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 5 (Januari, 2016): 1305.



because of its uniqueness, which is geographically the closest city to the metropolitan city of Surabaya, but its Islamic tradition is still very pure, especially with its status as the City of Zikir and Salawat.

The researcher chose to use the Continuity and Change theory developed by John Obert Voll, especially in relation to local Islamic traditions, in this case the *ngabulâ* tradition. The term continuity and change is used by John Obert Voll to describe the resurgence of Islam in the modern world. Voll introduced four basic styles of action which serve as a framework for social action in studying various dimensions of Islam, namely adaptationist, fundamentalist, conservative, and personal aspects.<sup>17</sup> The four actions formulated by Voll in this study are used to explore the continuity and change in the *ngabulâ* tradition vis-a-vis modernity in Bangkalan Islamic boarding schools and there may be revisions or additions to the concept, according to empirical findings in the field.

Especially for the fourth action which is related to the personal aspect, this research also relates it to the theory of charisma from Max Weber. This theory states that charisma is an irrational phenomenon that becomes the driving force through existing rules. In Weber's perspective, charismatic authority is a term used for certain personalities who are different from the average person, because they have special virtues and invisible features or at least extraordinary special qualities.<sup>18</sup> With this authority, it is not surprising if the kiai is visited by many guests, from the pesantren community and some people outside the pesantren, even from far locations from the kiai's residence. In the context of the *ngabulâ* tradition, these kiai have the charisma so that the students can obey them totally.

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<sup>17</sup> John Obert Voll, *Islam, Continuity and Change in the Modern World 2<sup>nd</sup> edition* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1994), 21.

<sup>18</sup> Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, translated by Talcott Parsons (New York: The Free Press, 1966), 358.





## Result

In the past, Bangkalan was known as a destination city for seekers of religious knowledge. Syaikhona Kholil was a teacher or *shaykh* of Muslim intellectual figures in Indonesia. History records the emergence of national ulama who were able to become the founders and pioneers of the establishment of large pesantrens in Java and Madura, having studied in Bangkalan. Not a few pesantren leaders in Indonesia have a *sanad* or lineage of continuity with Kiai Kholil, which is a clear example of his authority in carrying out Islamic preaching. Great scholars such as Kiai Hasyim Asy'ari (1871-1947), Kiai Abdul Wahab Hasbullah (1888-1971), Kiai Bisri Syamsuri, Kiai As'ad Syamsul Arifin, and other kiais had studied with Syaikhona Cholil Bangkalan.<sup>19</sup>

Modern era was begins and a lot of chalenges in this era are not easy, whatever the conditions, the orientation of education in pesantrens has also changed. The kiai, who is the leader of the pesantren, who was initially reluctant to accept formal education, is now experiencing a shift in thinking and behavior. Responding to curriculum changes and government policies, pesantren must be willing to shift orientation to be able to collaborate on the curriculum that has been running in their institutions. As time goes by, it is appropriate for pesantren to carry out various innovations, especially so that the implementation of pesantren can always be relevant to the needs of society. Not only that, the existence of the pesantren is also a big bet. If there is no enthusiasm for such adaptation, the existence of pesantren may be eroded by the times.<sup>20</sup>

This is very influential on the education of the pesantren in Bangkalan, Madura. The openness and acceptance of Kiai in Bangkalan in formal education can be seen from the increasing number of pesantren which are categorized as *salafiyah*, having formal education starting

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<sup>19</sup> Mohammad Takdir, "Kontribusi Kiai Cholil Bangkalan dalam Mengembangkan Tasawuf Nusantara," *'Anil Islam: Jurnal Kebudayaan dan Ilmu Keislaman* 9, no. 2 (December, 2016): 274.

<sup>20</sup> M. Djunaedi, "Revitalization of Islamic Education: Study on the Existence of Salafiyah Village in Parappe Village, Campalagian Sub-District, Polewali Mandar District," *Didaktika Religia: Journal of Islamic Education* 8, no. 1 (June 2020): 35.



from elementary to tertiary level. This is a separate phenomenon for the Madurese people, especially the Bangkalan people. The shift in institutional orientation in the perspective of the kiai that occurred in Bangkalan on the social structure has certainly greatly influenced the renewal of Islamic education in pesantren.<sup>21</sup>

However, recently the educational orientation of pesantren has begun to change because of modernity or in other word vis-à-vis modernity, there is a tradition that continues intensively, it mains that *ngabulâ*, and people who live it are called *kabulâ*. *Ngabulâ* is a tabarruk practice for kiai and their families, which is implemented in *khidmah* or serving the needs of the kiai, as well as *mulazamah* or togetherness with kiai.

In the social stratification of the kiai in Bangkalan, the highest position in community respect is to the kiai and pesantren, especially those with direct descent from Syaikhona Kholil. Descendants of Syaikhona Kholil had an association called Bani Kholil, and many also founded pesantren. Some of the pesantren in this study belonged to the descendants of Syaichona Kholil. The pesantren which were founded by Bani Kholil were not only located in Bangkalan, but also spread to Borneo Island.<sup>22</sup>

Kinship associations (also known as Bani or family ties); is a family organization that grows and develops in the midst of society consisting of members who have kinship or blood relations from one generation who become religious leaders (central figures) because the *karamah* and its role in social life are recognized by the community. All the behaviors and actions of the main characters then become their life characteristics that can be imitated and imitated by the community, especially by future generations, so that all their actions can be used as

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<sup>21</sup> Zainal Alim, "Pergeseran Orientasi Kelembagaan Pesantren di Madura; Perspektif Kiai di Bangkalan," *Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Islam* 4, no. 2 (November, 2016): 252.

<sup>22</sup> Abdur Rozaki, *Islam, Oligarki Politik dan Perlawanan Sosial*, 79-81.



a unique way of thinking and behaving every individual in the family, nation and state, which manifests in daily life.<sup>23</sup>

*Kabulâ* santri has special privileges that are not obtained by ordinary santri, both material and non-material. Material rights such as getting food rations from the kiai's family and some kiai have started giving money to the *kabulâ*. In special moments such as Eid, Nyai or Kiai also do *nyalenin* or to give clothes to the *kabulâs*.<sup>24</sup>

The non-material rights obtained by the *kabulâ* santri include lax regulations for them. If other santri are not allowed to use gadgets like smartphone, for example, *kabulâ* is associated with intense communication with the kiai's family, and then they are free to use gadgets. Likewise with mutual interactions with those are not *mahram*. If ordinary santri are very strict in their relationships, for the *kabulâ*, the rules are more lax.<sup>25</sup>

Likewise, permits to leave the pesantren. *Kabulâ* santris are freer to enter and exit the pesantren, in contrast to ordinary santri who are bound by strict regulations. *Kabulâ* related to their duties, requiring them to enter and exit the pesantren easily. They are even allowed to use vehicle facilities such as motorbikes or cars owned by the kiai.<sup>26</sup>

*Kabulâ* santris also have the right to go in and out of the private rooms of the kiai and their families. Usually the kiai have a *dhalem* where not all the students are allowed to approach or enter his privacy room. Meanwhile, *kabulâ* santris can freely enter the area which is the privacy of the kiai family. Thus the *kabulâs* also got other privileges; including being able to communicate with the kiai's honored guests.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Mas'odi and Rausi, "Tradition of Kiai's Kinship At Pesantren (Islamic Boarding School) In Madura (A Study on Trah, Kiai Kinship, and Pesantren in Sumenep)," *Edukasia: Jurnal Penelitian Pendidikan Islam* 14, no. 1 (Februari 2019): 210.

<sup>24</sup> Siti Rohmah (*kabulâ* of Nyai Filza in Ponpes Syaichona Moh. Cholil), in discussion with the author, August 28, 019.

<sup>25</sup> Observation in Ponpes Syaichona Moh. Cholil during February until December 2019.

<sup>26</sup> Observation in some Bangkalan Pesantrens in 2019.

<sup>27</sup> KH. Imam Buchori Cholil (head of Ponpes Ibnu Cholil Bangkalan), in discussion with the author, January 24, 2019.



In the *ngabulâ tradition*, here are some of the motives that encourage the *kabulâ* to live this tradition.

1) Parents instruction

In the Madurese Philosophy, there is an idiom “*bhuppa bhabhu’ guru rato*, the obedience to the parents is at the highest level. Therefore, if a parent orders their child to serve kiai, that is an order that cannot be refused, even though the santri actually have other desires or ideals. As told by Anisatul Yunaniyah who wanted to become an ordinary santri, but she had to carry out the tradition of serving the kiai because her mother told her to.<sup>28</sup>

2) Economic motives

Being a *kabulâ*, even though they are not paid in cash, but they also generally get several different facilities from other santris. The most common is getting free food from the kiai or nyai. That way, these students who do the ngabula can lighten the material burden of parents in sending their monthly allowances. This was conveyed by Muawanah.<sup>29</sup>

3) Looking for life experiences

Being *kabulâ* means having more opportunities to interact with the kiai and their families, compared to being ordinary santri. Thus *kabulâ* students can get valuable life experiences, see firsthand how the daily life of the kiai and their families, and even be invited to visit various places. For 32 years accompanying Nyai, making Habibah has a lot of experiences that other santris rarely get, namely visiting various places in the country such as Ambon, Pontianak, Bali, Banjarmasin, Semarang, Pekalongan, Jakarta, Bogor, Cirebon, Bandung, and others. She is also often invited abroad, such as to

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<sup>28</sup> Anisatul Yunaniyah (*kabulâ* in Ponpes Al Aziziyah 3, Sebaneh Bangkalan), in discussion with the author, July 23, 2019.

<sup>29</sup> Muawanah (*kabulâ* in Ponpes Syaichona Moh Cholil, especially in the residence of Nyai Hajjah Mutmainah Aschal), in discussion with the author, April 26, 2019.



Malaysia to visit several areas: Johor, Kedah, Negeri Sembilan, Malacca, Langkawi, and also to Singapore.<sup>30</sup>

4) Acquire certain skills

Practicing *ngabulâ* is also a training moment for various special skills, such as sewing, cooking and driving car. Some *kabulâs* have deliberately learned these various skills for their future provisions. Like Hani who learned to sew clothes because Nyai Fiky was going to start a business in the fashion sector.<sup>31</sup>

5) Expanding the Network of Friends and Business.

Kiai, apart from being a leader in the field of religion, usually also becomes a community figure who has broad relations. By becoming a *kabulâ* who is close to the kiai, this network of *kabulâ* friends is also expanding. Mahrus Ali, a former *kabulâ* who now works as a contractor, told how he initially had a wide network and was very supportive of his business. At that time, the kiai told him to build a gate for the pesantren. It was from this order that he became acquainted with Pak RW, Lurah, as well as several businessmen who were influential in the property business.<sup>32</sup>

6) Desire to be closer to the Kiai family

The kiai as the head of the pesantren has ability to take support from both domestic and foreign investors, foundations, and parents of students in order to manifest the hopes that are desired together.<sup>33</sup> That makes kiai and his family are an exclusive group in the Bangkalan pesantren. Not all pesantren residents can interact intensely with kiai families, except for certain people such as teachers and senior santris, santris who still have close kinship with kiai, pesantren administrators, and ofcourse, *kabulâs*. Therefore, if a santri wants to be closer to the kiai, one way is to become *kabulâ*. This

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<sup>30</sup> Habibah (*kabulâ* of Nyai hajjah Mutmainnah Aschal), in discussion with the author, October 12, 2019.

<sup>31</sup> Hanifatuz Zahroh (*kabulâ* di Ponpes Syaichona Moh Cholil), in discussion with the author, September 21, 2019.

<sup>32</sup> Mahrus Ali (*kabulâ* of Kiai Zubeir Muntashor, head of Ponpes Nurul Cholil Bangkalan), in discussion with the author, May 21, 2019.

<sup>33</sup> Naufal Ahmad Rijalul Alam, "Strengthening Leadership Culture (The Role of Kyai in Indonesian Pesantren)," *At-Ta'dib* 13, no. 1 (June 2018): 15.



became the motivation for Saipul Anwar to become *kabulâ* at the residence of Kiai Fakhruddin Aschal.<sup>34</sup>

7) Request of the kiai or his family

In *kabulâ* recruitment, sometimes the request came from the kiai or his family. If there are santri who are *ekasokane*, that is likeable, then the kiai or nyai will ask him to become his *kabulâ*. Usually because the students are descendants of friends or relatives of the kiai and their families, sometimes the students are descendants of the former kiai's *kabulâ* as well, or it could be because the santris are known to be diligent and obedient, even though they are from ordinary people and have no relationship whatsoever with the kiai's family. One of the *kabulâ* who was *ekasokane* because there were still kinship ties was Imron Syabrowi. From the beginning of his stay here he has become a *kabulâ* because he still has family ties. Kiai told him to in order to establish the relationship between them.<sup>35</sup>

8) Friend's invitation or influence

A *kabulâ* who has gained greatly from the tradition of *ngabulâ*, or who has remained at home in his service for a long time, will tell his experiences to close friends and relatives. Therefore, there are some *kabulâs* who registered themselves with the motive of friends or relatives invitation. Among them is Fitriyah, a *kabulâ* who came from Banyuates, Sampang.<sup>36</sup>

The *ngabulâ* tradition is carried out in various ways. Some are in the form of *khidmah* or serving the needs of the kiai and their families, as well as *mulazamah* or accompanying the kiai and their families, at their residence or on trips. All research subjects stated that they were

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<sup>34</sup> Saipul Anwar (*kabulâ* of Kiai Fakhruddin Aschal, Ponpes Syaichona Cholil Bangkalan), in discussion with the author, April 24, 2019.

<sup>35</sup> Imron Syabrowi (*kabulâ* of Nyai Mutmainnah, Ponpes Syaichona Moh Cholil Bangkalan) in discussion with the author, March 30, 2019.

<sup>36</sup> Fitriyah (*kabulâ* of Kiai Nasih Aschal, Ponpes Syaichona Moh. Cholil Bangkalan) in discussion with the author, September 20, 2019.



*kafulâs*, although the forms of the *tabarruk* or seeking blessings were different. The following are the various ways to serve the kiai family:

1) Childcare

It has become common situation in Bangkalan pesantrens, the *lora* and the little *neng* (the children of kiai) have their own caregivers from the *kafulâs*, who accompany them on their daily life, from waking up to bedtime at night. When Lora or neng was still not getting school, the *kafulâ* accompanied them to play around the pesantren. When the *lora* or neng went to school, the *kafulâs* also accompanied and waited at school until it was time to go home.<sup>37</sup>

2) *Dhalem* Cleanliness and its Environment

Among the *kafulâ* there are those who are responsible for the daily cleanliness of the kiai's house and everything in it. At RKH Fachrillah Aschal's residence, for example, there are several *kafulâs* who are given the task of keeping the entire house clean, including the cleanliness of the private rooms of the kiai and other family members. Among the *kafulâ* who was in charge of this matter was Siti Rohmah, a santri from Galis District, Bangkalan.<sup>38</sup>

3) Driver

Among the *kafulâ*'s duties are to become a driver and maintain the kiai's car. Apart from driving the car to certain places according to the orders of the kiai and his family, the *kafulâ* santri is also responsible for the vehicle. For this reason, all matters such as cleaning the car, its maintenance by bringing it to the repair shop, were handled by *kafulâ*. That was what Hasan Bisri usually does, a santri from Sampang, one of the *kafulâ* at residence of KH Fachrillah Aschal.<sup>39</sup>

4) Personal assistant.

From a lot of *kafulâs* who live with the kiai, there are several *kafulâs* whose duties are like personal assistants for the kiai. The kiai leave all personal matters to them, sometimes they even hold the kiai's

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<sup>37</sup> Observation around Yayasan Pendidikan As Salam, there were many *kafulâ s* waiting for lora and neng at school.

<sup>38</sup> Siti Rohmah, in discussion with the author, August 28, 2019.

<sup>39</sup> Hasan Bisri (*kafulâ* of KH Fachrillah Aschal in Ponpes Syaichona Moh. Cholil Bangkalan), in discussion with the author, September 22, 2019.



cellphone. So they receive and send calls on the orders of the kiai via the kiai's cellphone and arrange the schedule of guests who will meet the kiai. They accompany the kiai wherever he travels, and there are even more personal tasks such as preparing the kiai's bed and being ready outside the bathroom holding the clothes and towel when the kiai is bathing in it.<sup>40</sup>

#### 5) Receptionist

To meet the kiai at his residence, generally there are special procedures that must be carried out by the guest, except for guests from the kiai's own family or close friends. The researcher's experience during conducting research in the Bangkalan pesantren, it was not easy to meet and conduct interviews with kiai. Usually what researcher did was contact informants, who are generally graduates or families of the pesantren, and then the informant calls the closest *kabula* to the kiai to make an appointment. If the researcher did not have an informant who could connect to the kiai, then what the researcher did was going directly to the kiai's residence. Then there we could make sure there was some *kabulâs* ready to receive guests. There are times when the *kabulâ* receptionist has other duties such as being a driver, accompanying *lora* to play around, but some are really on standby at certain base.

At the residence of Kiai Nasih Aschal, for example, next to the entrance gate there was a room measuring three by four meters which was occupied by the *kabulâ* receptionist, and that was the base. The *kabulâ* always lived in it, and the base could not be left empty. At least out of the four *kabulâs*, a minimum of two must guard there. Their task was to welcome guests, to invite guests to enter the living room, which was separated between male guests and female. After that the *kabulâ* prepared drinks and treats.<sup>41</sup>

#### 6) Food and Beverage

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<sup>40</sup> Mahrus Ali, in discussion with the author, May 21, 2019.

<sup>41</sup> Observation in the residence of KH. Moh. Nasih Aschal, September 27, 2019.





Activities in the kitchen are closely related to shopping for groceries and cooking. Today, generally whatever the kiai and his family eat, the same food is eaten by the *kabulâs* who live with them. The kiai took responsibility for the food of all who live in his residence. This requires a special person in charge of this matter. Karimah was a *kabulâ* santri who was responsible for kitchen matters and serving food at KH Nasih Aschal's residence. Her daily duties range from shopping at the market in the morning after Fajr to preparing dinner.<sup>42</sup>

#### 7) Managing the Kiai's business

To meet their daily needs, kiai and their families have various kinds of businesses, in the fields of trade, services, and so on. Some have canteen that sells food, there are shops that sell daily supplies for students, tailors, and there are also boutiques that sell clothes to the wider community, not only to santris. For pesantren located in rural areas, the way to help the kiai's economy is to take grass for animal feed. Toyyib is a student who has experience in the kiai's canteen and he got meals twice a day for this task.<sup>43</sup>

#### 8) Washing Clothes

One of the duties of the *kabulâ* is to wash the clothes of the kiai and their families. Washing clothes was the responsibility of Zahroh, a female *kabulâ* who has just graduated from a pesantren. Every day her task was to take dirty clothes belonging to the kiai, Nyai, and their children, from one room to another. She did not wash using the washing machine, but only did the handwashing because the washing machine is broken. After washing and drying, while waiting for the clothes to dry, she cleaned up the rooms there. After the clothes were dry, the next task was to iron them and return them to wardrobes.<sup>44</sup>

*Ngabulâ* is carried out by mature santris in age and thinking. So in doing so they must have a goal to be achieved, which is in Weber's term is named in order to motive. These goals are:

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<sup>42</sup> Karimah (*kabulâ* of KH. Nasih Aschal in Ponpes Syaichona Moh. Cholil Bangkalan), in discussion with the author, September 20, 2019.

<sup>43</sup> Toyyib (*kabulâ* in canteen belongs to KH. Nasih Aschal) in discussion with the author, September 23, 2019.

<sup>44</sup> Zahroh (*Kabulâ* in the residence of KH. Nasih Aschal), in discussion with the author, September 21, 2019.



### 1) Tabarruk (seeking blessing)

All *ngabulâ* practitioners say that their main purpose in performing this service is for *tabarruk*, or to seek blessings through the teacher or kiai. *Barakah* itself is an abstract thing, so between one *kabulâ* and another one has different perceptions in explaining the *barakah*. Some of them have felt the blessings of implementing this tradition. Some have not felt it, but they are sure that one day they will feel it based on the stories of the previous *kabulâ*.<sup>45</sup>

### 2) Flexibility in obeying the rules of pesantren

*Kabulâs* have special privileges that are not obtained by ordinary santris, including flexibility in the rules of the pesantren. For example, they can go in and out of the pesantren without complicated permits, use the facilities provided by the kiai such as motorbikes, or they can even use cellphones, and free wifi is always available at the kiai's residence. Therefore, among the *kabulâ* there are those who aim not to be bound by strict pesantren regulations. In this case the researcher did not find such a *kabulâ* directly, but the researcher got information from another *kabulâ*, a senior *kabulâ*, even from one of the kiai's families. Imron Syabrowi stated that some of his friends did *ngabulâ* for reasons of flexibility in the rules of the pesantren, freedom, and comfort in terms of food.<sup>46</sup>

## Discussion

*Ngabulâ* can not be separated from the existence of the Bangkalan pesantren, since then until now. In some motives, the forms of practice and purpose in this tradition appear to contrast with modern life. But in reality, *ngabulâ* can also still continue, even though there are some changes. *Kabulâ* santris are the main figures in the *ngabulâ* tradition because they are the spearheads who practice this tradition. Even though they are a community with various similarities, but as

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<sup>45</sup> Fitriyah, in discussion with the author, September 21, 2019.

<sup>46</sup> Imron Syabrowi, in discussion with the author, April 20, 2019.



individuals, of course, each of them also has a personal meaning for what they are doing.

For Habibah, who has lived this tradition for more than thirty years, *ngabulâ* is not only about obedience, but more than that, namely respect. If it is about obedience, any *santri* could do what the kiai ordered, but not wholeheartedly. Just out of fear, for example. Meanwhile, if out of respect, the order will be carried out wholeheartedly.<sup>47</sup> Sahriyanto has his own meaning of *ngabulâ*. For him, doing this is a special process of gathering with knowledgeable people, and Allah elevates the degree and dignity of the knowledgeable person. Santris who do the *ngabulâ* have more opportunities to get the privilege of gathering with knowledgeable people, so serving them is a matter of pride.<sup>48</sup>

For Imron Syabrowi, *ngabulâ* has its own meaning, it means that the learning process for students, as well as the seeking for the most effective experiences. As a learning process, according to him, students who do the *ngabulâ* must also remember their main purpose of learning, so they do not become complacent in the process of serving kiai. Sometimes because of the focus on being *kabulâ*, and serving the teachers, they forgot that this is a learning process.<sup>49</sup>

For Samuti, who has lived the *ngabulâ* since 1985, this tradition is a way of obtaining blessings and various miracles. Even though she does not get a high regular salary, but she can also build a suitable house, and completing the pilgrimage.<sup>50</sup> From the perspectives of the kiais family, Nyai Eva stated that this tradition is a total dedication of the students to their teachers. The *kabulâ* in Bangkalan generally perform all domestic tasks in total, so that the kiai family is not trained and is not used to doing household chores. For this reason, in the case of childcare,

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<sup>47</sup> Habibah, in discussion with the author, May 12, 2020.

<sup>48</sup> Sahriyanto (*kabulâ* in the residence of KH. Nasih Aschal, Ponpes Syaichona Moh Cholil), in discussion with the author, May 13, 2020.

<sup>49</sup> Imron Syabrowi, in discussion with the author, May 14, 2020.

<sup>50</sup> Samuti (*kabulâ* of Nyai Hj. Mutmainnah Aschal), in discussion with the author, 18 February 2019.



Nyai Eva does not want to adjust the common tradition in Bangkalan pesantren<sup>51</sup>

*Ngabulâ* also has its own meaning for KH. Ahmad Fauzi Sakdullah, namely as a process of training and provision of skills, therefore he continues to adjust this tradition in his pesantren and in particular his residence. In his pesantren, apart from the specific *kafulâ*, there is also a tradition of training ordinary santri to take turn in serving at the residence of the kiai and their families.<sup>52</sup> Another research subject is Syafi'i whose all children carry out the tradition of *ngabulâ*. For him, when the kiai asked them to serve, it was a mandate and pride, as well as a way to get blessings.<sup>53</sup>

Meanwhile, regarding continuity and change of *ngabulâ* can be seen in the following table:

Research Focus	Continuity	Change
Motives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Parent's instruction</li> <li>- Economic motive</li> <li>- Request of kiai</li> <li>- To be closer to kiai's family</li> <li>- Friend's influence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Looking for more experience</li> <li>- Acquire certain skills</li> <li>- Expanding the Network of Friends and Business</li> </ul>
Purposes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Seeking blessings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Flexibility in the rules of pesantren</li> </ul>

<sup>51</sup> Nyai Hj. Eva Albatul (one of the descendants of founder of Ponpes Al-Aziziyah, in discussion with the author, October 14, 2019.

<sup>52</sup> KH. Ahmad Fauzi Sakdullah (Head of Ponpes Al-Hidayah 2) in discussion with the author, January 13, 2020.

<sup>53</sup> Syafi'i (a father of 10 *kafulâ s* in Ponpes Syaichona Moh. Cholil) in discussion with the author, August 25, 2019.



Forms of practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Food and Beverage</li> <li>- Washing clothes</li> <li>- Receptionist</li> <li>- Cleaning the <i>dhalem</i>.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To be assistant</li> <li>- Maintaining vehicles</li> <li>- Childcare</li> <li>- Managing business of kiai</li> </ul>
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Table of continuity and change in *ngabulâ* tradition

Based on the table above, the motives for *ngabulâ* that have been continuing for a long time are parent’s instruction, economic motives, the kiai’s request, desire to be closer to the kiai’s family, and friend’s influence. Meanwhile, the motive that changes along with modernity is the desire to gain more experiences, acquire certain skills, and expand the network of friends. On the purpose, what still continue is to seek blessings, and what has changed is the desire to gain flexibility in the rules of the pesantren. Meanwhile, in the practical form, what is still continuing is in culinary, washing clothes, receptionist, and cleaning the house. Meanwhile, there are several practices that have begun to change with modernity, including being a personal assistant as a sharing partner, caring for children, and helping the kiai’s family economy by managing the kiai’s business units.

To see the continuity and change of the *ngabulâ* tradition, this study uses four basic forms of action that are conceptualized by John Obert Voll, namely adaptationist, fundamentalist, conservative, and personal or charismatic aspects. Because Voll himself considered the four basic forms of action to be informal and rigid, this discussion is accompanied by modifications and additions according to the results of research and findings in the field, namely generous manner from the kiai and his family.

Adaptationists are reflected in the various adaptations and adjustments made by the kiai for the continuity of *ngabulâ*. The empirical proof for this is that *kabulâs* are allowed to attend school and college, and that there is a good arrangement between the schedule for



the *ngabulâ* practice and studying.<sup>54</sup> Fundamentalist actions, which researchers call text authority, are contained in the teaching of the classic books or *turath* containing respect, manners, ethics, and student service to teachers. The most popular book is *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim* written by al-Zarnuji.

Conservative action can be the spread of stories of previous *kabulâs* that have been successful in their present life, or bad stories of *kabulâs* who are *kenning bâlât* (have bad luck). in pesantren circles, it is not uncommon for santri to be known for their success or bad luck. This bad luck is linked to what he did in the past while in the pesantren, it could be because he violated orders from kiai and teachers.<sup>55</sup>

Meanwhile, the kiai's charisma is also a supporting factor for the continuity of *ngabulâ*, both the charisma due to the lineage and the one that the kiai gets because of the high level of knowledge and character. Judging from the authority of the kiais, their offspring have the potential to inherit *karamah* (miracle) and give blessings to others. In the pesantren tradition, charismatic giving is not only seen as an ascribed status, but can be achieved, theoretically by everyone but is practically limited to certain people, especially those who are offspring of kiai, through the practice of *riyadloh* under kiai's strict guidance.<sup>56</sup>

Another factor that the researcher adds to this is generous manner, that is, there must be good treatment from the kiai and their families to the *kabulâs*. Such generous manner, for example, is the understanding of the kiai not to give tasks during the students' study hours, to provide proper food and clothing even the same as those worn by the kiai's family, and also small things such as calling Bu Nyai as

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<sup>54</sup> KH. Imam Buchori Cholil, in discussion with the author, January 24, 2019.

<sup>55</sup> Mahrus Ali, in discussion with the author, May 21, 2019.

<sup>56</sup> Achmad Zainal Arifin, "Transmitting Charisma: Re-reading Weber through the Traditional Islamic Leader in Modern Java," *Sosiologi Reflektif* 9, no. 2 (April 2015): 9.



“ummi”, which is very profound, that is the *kabulâ* felt like he had the same position as Nyai’s biological children.<sup>57</sup>

## **Conclusions**

*First*, related to the meaning of the *ngabulâ* tradition for people who are closely related to this tradition, namely the *kabulâ* themselves, the kiai and their families, and also the parents of the *kabulâ*. For the *kabulâ*, this tradition means respect for the kiai, maximum devotion, a pride in being close to the kiai, a source of blessings, and also a process of training. For the kiai, the tradition of *ngabulâ* means the process of learning, providing assistance, as well as a medium for sharing experiences and providing training. For *kabulâ*’s parents, this tradition is proof of the kiai’s trust in *kabulâ*, and also training to cultivate obedience. For conclusion, *ngabulâ* for the people involved means respect, dedication, learning media, and a source of blessings.

*Second*, related to the continuity and change of *ngabulâ*, this is particularly could be seen from the motives, forms of the practice of *ngabulâ*, and the purposes of the *kabulâ*. This research is in line with John Obert Voll’s conception of continuity and change in a tradition. In the continuity of *ngabulâ* vis-à-vis modernity, in Voll’s theory, there are four basic styles of action, namely adaptationist, fundamentalist, conservative, and charisma. The researcher added one form of action, namely generous manner from the kiai.

Various conclusions and theoretical implications in this study still contain limitations both at the theoretical and methodological levels, so they are very open to criticism and revision. One of them is that this research ignores the influence of the level and style of education of kiai or pesantren leaders on the continuity and change of the tradition of *ngabulâ* in the pesantren or their residences. Further research by exploring the educational background of the kiai as research subject will certainly be interesting, because it could be that differences in educational backgrounds lead to differences in the pattern of the tradition of *ngabulâ* in the pesantren. Further limitation, this study

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<sup>57</sup> Taufiqurrohman (*kabulâ* in Ponpes Al-Ghozali Buduran), in discussion with the author, December 16, 2019.



focuses on continuity and change in *ngabulâ* from time to time, with a dichotomy of “past” and “now” without certain time and period. Further research with periodization will certainly make the boundaries even clearer.

As a recommendation for future researchers, research on the *ngabulâ* tradition is very unfortunate if it stops here, while there are many other things that can be used as further research topics. For example, the impact of childcare of the *kabulâ* toward *lora* and *neng* on the bond between parents and children. It is also interesting to explore the effect of the *kabulâ*'s childcare (which is completely obedient to the *lora* and *neng*) on the ability to overcome life difficulties (adversity quotient) of the *lora* and *neng* in the future. This is important to be examined further, because at this time it has been seen so many *kiais* cannot leave their comfort zone. The impact for Bangkalan is that there is no truly large and high quality *pesantren*. The glory of the Bangkalan *pesantren* existed in the past, and if traced through various sources, currently there is not any *pesantren* in Bangkalan that is included in the top 10 best *pesantren* in East Java.

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