

The Role of NU Figures in Cultural Da‘wah: A Collaborative Study of K.H. Abdul Manan Dipomenggolo and Mbah Ketok Jenggot in Tremas

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Abstract

Cultural da‘wah in Java has frequently advanced through negotiated encounters between Islamic teachings and local socio-cultural systems. In Tremas (Pacitan), the historical narratives of land clearing (*babat alas*) and the subsequent emergence of pesantren leadership illustrate how spiritual authority and social legitimacy can jointly shape community Islamization across different periods. This study addresses two questions: (1) How does cultural da‘wah through acculturation, indigenization, and cultural mediation explain the roles and legitimacy of local figures (Mbah Ketok Jenggot and K.H. Abdul Manan Dipomenggolo) in fostering the acceptance of Islam in Tremas? (2) How does the pesantren as an educational da‘wah institution via religious habitus formation, cadre reproduction, and scholarly networks explain K.H. Abdul Manan’s strategies in institutionalizing Islam sustainably in Tremas? Employing a qualitative descriptive design, the study draws on documentary data from *Manuskrip Tremas* (Ahmad Muhammad) and semi-structured interviews with key local custodians (the hamlet head and the site caretaker). Data were collected through systematic reading—note-taking and interviews, then analyzed using an interactive model (data reduction, display, and conclusion drawing). The findings indicate that Mbah Ketok Jenggot functions as a cultural mediator whose land-clearing narratives and symbolic authority provide early socio-cultural legitimacy, enabling Islam to enter local meaning systems gradually. K.H. Abdul Manan’s da‘wah is consolidated through the establishment of mosque-based learning and pesantren infrastructure that stabilizes religious practice, produces disciplined religious habitus, and sustains transmission through educational routines and expanding scholarly lineages. The study recommends strengthening local historical-literacy documentation as a cultural da‘wah resource, structuring pesantren-based cadre formation for continuity, and expanding inter-pesantren/NU networks for

broader educational impact. Future research should deepen triangulation across archives, multi-informant narratives, and long-term ethnographic observation to refine understanding of cultural mediation processes.

Keywords: **Da‘wah Collaboration; Babat Alas; Tremas; K.H. Abdul Manan; Mbah Ketok Jenggot**

Abstrak

Dakwah kultural di Jawa kerap berlangsung melalui proses negosiasi antara ajaran Islam dan sistem sosial-budaya lokal. Di Tremas (Pacitan), narasi babat alas (pembukaan lahan) dan tumbuhnya kepemimpinan pesantren memperlihatkan bagaimana otoritas spiritual dan legitimasi sosial dapat saling menguatkan dalam proses penerimaan dan pelembagaan Islam lintas periode. Penelitian ini menjawab dua pertanyaan: (1) Bagaimana dakwah kultural melalui mekanisme akulturasi, pribumisasi, dan mediasi budaya menjelaskan peran serta legitimasi tokoh lokal (Mbah Ketok Jenggot dan K.H. Abdul Manan Dipomenggolo) dalam membangun penerimaan Islam di Tremas? (2) Bagaimana pesantren sebagai institusi dakwah pendidikan dalam pembentukan habitus religius, kaderisasi, dan jaringan keilmuan menjelaskan strategi K.H. Abdul Manan dalam menginstitusionalisasikan Islam di Tremas secara berkelanjutan? Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif dengan sumber data dokumen Manuskrip Tremas (Ahmad Muhammad) dan wawancara semi-terstruktur dengan informan kunci (kepala dusun/juru kunci Tremas). Data dihimpun melalui teknik simak–catat terhadap dokumen dan wawancara, kemudian dianalisis memakai model interaktif: reduksi data, penyajian data, dan penarikan kesimpulan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Mbah Ketok Jenggot berperan sebagai mediator budaya yang menyediakan legitimasi awal melalui narasi babat alas dan simbol-simbol lokal, sehingga Islam dapat masuk ke dalam sistem makna masyarakat secara bertahap. K.H. Abdul Manan memperkuat proses Islamisasi melalui strategi dakwah pendidikan dengan membangun pengajian berbasis masjid dan infrastruktur pesantren yang menstabilkan praktik keagamaan, membentuk habitus religius, serta menopang keberlanjutan transmisi ajaran melalui pola pendidikan dan jejaring keilmuan. Penelitian merekomendasikan penguatan dokumentasi literasi sejarah lokal sebagai sumber dakwah kultural, pengembangan kaderisasi terstruktur berbasis pesantren untuk menjamin keberlanjutan dakwah, dan perluasan kolaborasi jejaring pesantren/NU untuk memperkuat otoritas keilmuan serta dampak sosial. Riset lanjutan disarankan melakukan triangulasi lebih luas (arsip, multi-informan, dan observasi etnografis jangka panjang) guna memperdalam pemahaman tentang mekanisme mediasi budaya dalam proses Islamisasi lokal.

Kata Kunci: **Kolaborasi Dakwah,Babat Alas, Tremas, K.H Abdul Manan, Mbah Ketok Jenggot**

Introduction

Tremas, a village located in Arjosari Subdistrict, Pacitan Regency, holds several distinctive features. In addition to being known as a “village of learning” due to the presence of a centuries-old Islamic boarding school (pesantren), Tremas is also popularly recognized as the birthplace of Indonesia’s sixth president, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono. Tremas is situated approximately 11 kilometers north of Pacitan’s regency center (Herlianto A, 2021).

The name “Tremas” is said to derive from two words: *trem*, from *patrem* meaning a weapon or small keris, and *mas*, meaning gold, a precious metal commonly used for women’s jewelry. This etymology is closely connected to a story about the clearing of a forest that later became known as Tremas. The first person to clear the forest was a court officer from Surakarta named Ketok Jenggot, acting on the king’s orders as a reward for his services in safeguarding the palace from danger (Wiyonggo Seto, 2015).

Mbah Ketok Jenggot and K.H. Abdul Manan Dipomenggolo, although coming from different backgrounds and periods, succeeded in combining spiritual and social power in disseminating Islamic teachings in Tremas. Mbah Ketok Jenggot, whose birth name was Raden Bagus Sudarmaji, served as an officer of the Surakarta Hadiningrat Palace (Rojihan, 2021). Known as the pioneer (*babat alas*) of Tremas Village in Arjosari, Pacitan, East Java, he is popularly described as possessing extraordinary spiritual prowess, including the legend that his long beard could not be cut by any weapon (Al Ahmadi, 2023). Ki Ketok Jenggot was considered no ordinary person. He was credited with suppressing the rebellion of Adipati Bantheng Wereng against the kingdom. After Bantheng Wereng’s defeat, Ki Ketok Jenggot (Ki Bagus Sudarmadji) reported his success to the King in Surakarta and was granted *tanah perdikan* (tax-exempt land) north of Semanten Village, with the task of clearing the forest in that area (Herlianto A, 2021). It is also noted that prior to Ketok Jenggot’s forest clearing, a group had already settled in the area, including Raden Ngabehi Honggowijoyo (K.H. Abdul Manan’s father-in-law). After seeking permission and explaining his mission, Ketok Jenggot proceeded to clear much of the forest. Upon completion, the *patrem emas* he carried was said to have been planted at the spot where he first began the clearing; the newly opened area was then named “Tremas” (Wiyonggo Seto, 2015). “Mbah Ketok Jenggot started it. Then the early roots of Pesantren Tremas emerged through Raden Dipomenggolo. While studying at Tegalsari, Ponorogo, Raden Dipomenggolo was a fellow struggler with Prince Diponegoro,” stated K.H. Fuad Habib Dimyathi during the groundbreaking ceremony for a madrasah building on Saturday (23/01/2022) (Muhsdhori Ahmad, 2022).

The history of Pesantren Tremas is closely intertwined with the formation of Pacitan and Tremas and with local religious developments. In the fifteenth century CE, the archipelago was under Majapahit rule, and much of the population adhered to Hindu-Buddhist traditions, including in southern Wengker (Pacitan). Islamic preachers from Demak Bintara—led by Ki Ageng Petung, Ki Ageng Posong, and Shaykh Maulana Maghribi later

disseminated Islam. Following their passing, Islam’s development in Pacitan accelerated (Fitriatul Mahmudah, 2017).

Born Bagus Darso, the son of the village head (*demang*) of Semanten, Pacitan, Raden Ngabehi Dipomenggolo is recognized as the founder (*mu’assis*) of Pesantren Tremas, established in the early nineteenth century (circa 1820). His major role in laying the foundations for Islamic propagation through pesantren education earned him recognition as a pioneer and one of the early initiators of other pesantren in the archipelago, which expanded rapidly from the late nineteenth to early twentieth centuries (Ahmad Muhammad, 2019).

As a teenager, he was sent by his father to Tegalsari Pesantren in Ponorogo to study Islamic knowledge under Kiai Hasan Besari. During his time there, Bagus Darso studied diligently and consistently; due to his persistence, discipline, and intelligence, his mastery of religious sciences reportedly surpassed many of his peers. After being considered sufficiently trained, he returned to Semanten (Anwar Sanusi, 2023).

Upon returning from his educational journey, he established a pesantren in Semanten (approximately one kilometer north of Pacitan city). On the basis of familial considerations, distance from political centers and crowds, and a more conducive learning environment for students, he later relocated to Tremas (Muhammad Imron, 2017).

K.H. Abdul Manan is described as laying the first foundations of Pesantren Tremas after completing his studies at Tegalsari. His initial step was building a mosque. As students from Semanten and other regions began to arrive, a simple dormitory was built south of the mosque, constructed from bamboo and thatch. Funding for the early construction came from his father-in-law, Demang Tremas Raden Ngabehi Honggowijoyo (a relative within the Dipomenggolo family line).

K.H. Abdul Manan Dipomenggolo was known as a scholar with deep religious knowledge who attracted followers through a da‘wah approach characterized by warmth and wisdom. He is also recognized as one of the pioneers of the wider Nusantara scholarly network, as subsequent generations traced from his lineage most notably Shaykh Mahfudz al-Tarmasi produced prominent students such as K.H. Hasyim Asy‘ari, K.H. Wahab Hasbullah, and K.H. Bisri Syansuri, who later founded Nahdlatul Ulama in 1926 (Faizin and Mahbib, 2014).

This study is situated within pesantren scholarship, which is not a new research domain. Earlier studies have examined the role of local religious figures in the history of

Islamization in Indonesia, including the role of *kiai* within pesantren and Islamic educational centers in Java. Other works highlight da'wah strategies that foreground local values in engaging diverse communities.

By undertaking this research, the study not only recognizes the uniqueness and cultural value of these figures, but also contributes to sustaining cultural, social, and economic continuity in Tremas Village. The study is expected to generate synergy between tradition and modernity and to provide deeper understanding of the roles of spiritual figures in local society.

Previous research on Pesantren Tremas includes Wijayanti's (2016) undergraduate thesis on collective leadership in policy decision-making at Perguruan Islam Pondok Tremas, which emphasized the institution's vision, mission, and educational foundations (sincerity, simplicity, freedom, self-reliance, mutual help, and *ukhuwah diniyah*). Historical discussion in that study was limited to a brief institutional profile. Another relevant work is Mahmudah's (2017) thesis on the salafiyah education system as a source of competitive advantage at Perguruan Islam Pondok Tremas, focusing on how Tremas maintains salafiyah education in the modern era. Both works discuss leadership dynamics across different periods, yet neither specifically examines K.H. Abdul Manan's da'wah struggles in detail; they provide only brief descriptions. The key difference between the two studies lies in their focus: educational foundations versus the sustainability of salafiyah education.

Based on the above, this study formulates the following research questions: How does cultural da'wah through acculturation, indigenization, and cultural mediation explain the roles and legitimacy of local figures (Mbah Ketok Jenggot and K.H. Abdul Manan) in building acceptance of Islam in Tremas? And how does the pesantren as an educational da'wah institution through religious habitus formation, cadre development, and scholarly networks explain K.H. Abdul Manan's strategies in sustainably institutionalizing Islam in Tremas?

Research Method

This research employs a qualitative descriptive approach. According to Creswell (2009), qualitative research uses textual and visual materials to analyze data creatively through various inquiry strategies. Qualitative research aims to obtain a holistic understanding of a phenomenon from the perspective of the people studied. It deals with ideas, perceptions, opinions, and beliefs that cannot be measured numerically (Moleong, 2006). Data sources

include the documentary text *Manuskrip Tremas* by Ahmad Muhammad and key informants who serve as the hamlet head and Tremas site caretaker. The data consist of words and sentences from the manuscript and interview notes relating to Mbah Ketok Jenggot as the land-clearing pioneer of Tremas. Data collection was conducted through document observation and systematic note-taking, as well as interviews. The note-taking technique is an advanced procedure used in conjunction with observational methods, including participant and non-participant observation approaches, whereby relevant data from texts are recorded (Firdhayanti, 2020). Interviews are conversations conducted with a particular purpose between an interviewer and an interviewee (Moleong, 2006). The collected data were classified according to analytical needs and examined using an interactive analysis model. Miles and Huberman’s (1994) interactive model consists of three concurrent flows: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification.

Cultural Da‘wah Theory: Acculturation, Indigenization, and Cultural Mediation

Cultural da‘wah is an approach that places culture as the primary medium for communicating Islamic values through symbols, language, rituals, arts, and social relations. In the anthropology of religion, religion does not exist in a vacuum; it is always “articulated” through local meaning systems already embedded in society. Accordingly, cultural da‘wah may be understood as a communicative strategy that aligns normative religious messages with local cultural structures so that acceptance becomes persuasive and sustainable (Geertz, 1960; Koentjaraningrat, 1985).

Within the framework of acculturation, religious change occurs through mutual penetration of cultural elements in which Islamic values enter social life without necessarily severing all existing cultural expressions. This theory emphasizes that religious transformation is typically gradual and selective: certain local elements are retained as social expressions, while others are reinterpreted to align with new religious norms. In the Javanese Islamic context, historical scholarship shows that Islamization often proceeds through complex syntheses and adjustments between normative teachings and local practices (Ricklefs, 2006; Woodward, 1989).

The concept of indigenization (*pribumisasi*) of Islam argues that “locality” is not a threat to religion, but rather a space of social expression so long as it does not contradict core religious principles. Theoretically, indigenization can be read as an effort to make Islam present as an embodied social ethic rather than merely a formal identity by recognizing local

cultural forms as pedagogical, cultural, and social vehicles. This framework helps position da‘wah as a value negotiation process that is sensitive to context without losing normative orientation (Wahid, 2001; Hefner, 2000).

Sociologically, cultural da‘wah can also be explained through cultural mediation theory: religious messages become effective when mediated by symbols and authorities recognized by the community. In such mediation, symbolic language (narratives, myths, rituals, and traditions) functions as a cognitive-affective bridge that reduces distance between religious teachings and people’s lived social experience. Cultural da‘wah thus operates not only through the transmission of knowledge, but also through the formation of collective meaning, identity, and social solidarity (Geertz, 1960; Hefner, 2000).

Pesantren as an Educational Da‘wah Institution: Habitus, Cadre Reproduction, and Scholarly Networks

The pesantren can be theorized as a socio-religious institution that performs da‘wah through education, moral formation, and the production of religious leadership. Within pesantren traditions, da‘wah is not limited to preaching or teaching sessions; it is realized through structured learning systems and strong pedagogical relations between *kiai* and *santri*, supported by the authority of classical Islamic texts. Therefore, pesantren may be positioned as a center for reproducing Islamic tradition that maintains continuity of values, practices, and religious authority at the community level (Dhofier, 1994; Steenbrink, 1986).

From the perspective of practice theory, pesantren produces religious habitus durable dispositions formed through repeated routines of worship, social discipline, etiquette, and learning culture. Habitus makes religiosity not merely normative knowledge but a way of life that regulates daily social action. In this framework, pesantren education functions as an effective mechanism of value internalization because it integrates cognitive, affective, and practical dimensions within a single social ecosystem (Bourdieu, 1990; Dhofier, 1994).

Pesantren may also be explained as a community of practice in which religious competence develops through gradual participation moving from peripheral to central involvement (*legitimate peripheral participation*). This theory emphasizes that learning occurs through meaningful engagement in social activities rather than mere content transfer. In pesantren contexts, intellectual apprenticeship (adab, discipline, and the social role of the *santri*) becomes a core element of education and da‘wah because it forms religious identity through collective experience (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Steenbrink, 1986).

Finally, pesantren operates within scholarly networks and intellectual mobility that extend its authority beyond local boundaries. Network theories of knowledge explain how chains of transmission (*sanad*), teacher–student relations, and text circulation generate legitimacy and standardize religious knowledge. Thus, pesantren is not merely a local institution but a node within a broader Islamic intellectual ecology that produces cadres of scholars and strengthens transmission of religious tradition across regions and generations (Azra, 2004; van Bruinessen, 1994).

Findings and Discussion

The Process of Land Clearing in Tremas by Mbah Ketok Jenggot

Tremas Village was established by a figure named Ki Bagus Sudarmadji, an officer of the Surakarta Hadiningrat Palace originating from Semanten, Pacitan. He was said to have an extraordinarily long beard that could not be cut by any weapon. For this reason, the early origins of Tremas are popularly associated with the epithet “Ketok Jenggot.”

Based on an interview with the Tremas village head, Mbah Ketok Jenggot cleared land north of Semanten under the King of Surakarta’s orders. The interview excerpt states: “Ki Ketok Jenggot was not an ordinary person. He played a major role in suppressing the rebellion of Adipati Bantheng Wereng against the kingdom. His birth name was Raden Bagus Sudarmaji, but due to his extraordinary powers he was called Ki Ketok Jenggot. After Bantheng Wereng’s defeat, Ki Ketok Jenggot (Ki Bagus Sudarmadji) reported to the King in Surakarta. He was granted tax-exempt land north of Semanten and instructed to clear the forest in that area. However, the year in which he cleared the Tremas forest remains disputed to this day.” (CLHW 01/NK)

This interview indicates that Mbah Ketok Jenggot (Raden Bagus Sudarmaji) was credited with suppressing Bantheng Wereng’s rebellion. After reporting his success to the King, he received *tanah perdikan* north of Semanten and was tasked with clearing the forest in that region. Yet, the precise timing of the Tremas clearing remains contested.

Another interview with a local resident suggests that Mbah Ketok Jenggot was widely believed to possess extraordinary spiritual power:

“Mbah Ketok Jenggot was known for his supernatural prowess; even his long beard was said to be impervious to weapons. It is said that he cleared haunted forests by offering a sacrifice in the form of a small golden keris, which later inspired the name ‘Tremas.’ The heirloom was planted in the ground in Krajan Hamlet, the same area as the Nahdatul Ummah prayer house, located on land endowed by Indonesia’s sixth president, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (SBY). Raden Bagus Sudarmaji also

possessed a staff made of *pucang kalak* wood, obtained during meditation beneath a tree while holding the staff. He is said to have died by *musno* disappearing bodily and the area is now known as Kulak Hamlet, Tremas Village. Local people believe his grave lies north of Pesantren Tremas, Pacitan. However, stories about his beard and other powers remain unverified and lack concrete evidence.” (CLHW 02/Q)

This account presents Mbah Ketok Jenggot as the figure believed to have cleared “haunted” forests in Tremas, associated with a golden keris as a symbolic “offering” linked to the village’s name. The narrative also connects the symbolism to Krajan Hamlet and the Nahdatul Umam prayer house. However, the informant simultaneously acknowledges the lack of verifiable evidence for these supernatural claims.

Da‘wah Strategies Employed by K.H. Abdul Manan in Disseminating Islam in Tremas

Born Bagus Darso, the son of the Semanten village head, Raden Ngabehi Dipomenggolo is described as the founder (*mu’assis*) of Pesantren Tremas, established in the early nineteenth century (circa 1820). In promoting Islam, he employed several strategies. The study identifies four pieces of data on K.H. Abdul Manan’s da‘wah strategies from *Manuskrip Tremas*, as described below.

Da‘wah Strategy Through Establishing a Pesantren

Data (1):

“His major role as the founder of Islamic propagation through education (pesantren) made him worthy of recognition as a pioneer and one of the initiators of other pesantren in the archipelago, which began to emerge from the late nineteenth to early twentieth centuries.”

This indicates that K.H. Abdul Manan’s primary da‘wah strategy was establishing a pesantren. He laid the foundations for Islamic dissemination through education, positioning himself as a key pioneer in pesantren development. His contribution extended beyond building a single institution; it opened pathways for the later proliferation of pesantren, making pesantren-based education a critical foundation for Indonesian Muslims.

Data (2):

“His decision to move to Tremas, his father-in-law’s residence located eight kilometers to the north, was considered strategic and far more conducive, given that Tremas already had a stronger intellectual tradition. Although it required considerable time since he still managed the pesantren in Semanten this did not hinder him due to

strong moral support from both his parents and his in-laws during the process of establishing the pesantren in Tremas.”

This suggests that relocating to Tremas was a strategic choice. Tremas was considered more conducive and already possessed an intellectual tradition, facilitating pesantren growth. Despite continued responsibilities in Semanten, the availability of strong familial support sustained the pesantren-building process in Tremas.

Data (3):

“Entering the 1840s, seeing the pesantren continue to grow and the situation as sufficiently safe and relatively stable, Kiai Abdul Manan began to think about the future of his pesantren. He felt the need to learn more as provision for managing a pesantren that was developing significantly.”

This illustrates a reflexive strategy: as the pesantren expanded and conditions stabilized, K.H. Abdul Manan sought further learning to meet increasingly complex institutional demands. Continuous learning becomes part of an adaptive leadership approach for sustaining educational da‘wah.

Da‘wah Strategy Through Initiating Religious Study Circles (*Pengajian*)

Data (4):

“After establishing religious study circles in the Semanten village mosque for some time, in 1830 Kiai Abdul Manan moved to Tremas for several reasons:

1. He became the son-in-law of Ngabehi Honggowijoyo, who served as *demang*. Honggowijoyo was related to Dipomenggolo. Recent findings indicate his wife was Nyai Andawiyah, granddaughter of Kiai Nuriman Mlangi, also known as BPH Sandiyo/KGPH Haryo Kartosuro, the elder brother of PB II and HB I.
2. Tremas at the time was a prosperous area, with fertile rice fields and reportedly many valuable objects such as gold, which supported the development of a pesantren.
3. Tremas was the only area in Pacitan whose population still adhered to Hindu-Siwa, also known as Javanese Hinduism. Thus, Tremas was considered a highly appropriate location for the da‘wah of the young scholar Abdul Manan. With a da‘wah approach adapted to local conditions, gradually but surely, the people of Tremas became Muslims and practiced Islamic teachings well.”

This indicates that K.H. Abdul Manan’s da‘wah strategy involved expanding mosque-based *pengajian* and relocating to Tremas due to kinship networks, socio-economic potential,

and the religious composition of the population. By adapting da‘wah to local social conditions, Islamization is presented as a gradual and persuasive process culminating in widespread Islamic adherence.

Analysis of Cultural Da‘wah: Acculturation, Indigenization, and Cultural Mediation in the Formation of Local Islam

From the perspective of cultural da‘wah, da‘wah success is not determined solely by the “content of the message,” but by the capacity of da‘wah to operate within local meaning systems. In anthropological terms, religion is always “articulated” through symbols and practices already understood by society; thus, effective da‘wah typically does not begin by totally severing tradition, but by reading cultural structures that serve as references for collective identity (Geertz, 1960; Koentjaraningrat, 1985). In this context, narratives of land clearing, place naming, and founding figures function as symbolic resources linking social change to perceptions of “appropriateness” and “acceptability” within the community.

The acculturation framework explains that religious transformation unfolds through gradual and selective encounters between religious values and local socio-cultural practices. Local elements that serve social cohesion tend to be maintained, while their meanings are reinterpreted to align with new religious norms (Ricklefs, 2006; Woodward, 1989). Within this study’s data, *babat alas* narratives and the “golden *patrem*” symbol can be read as cultural devices organizing collective memory and social boundaries; as Islam enters, such devices do not necessarily disappear but can become “bridges” of acceptance because the community already recognizes them as references for origins and legitimacy.

The concept of indigenization (*pribumisasi*) emphasizes that Islam can become an embodied social ethic when its expression can utilize local media without losing normative orientation. Indigenization does not mean arbitrarily “Islamizing” culture; rather, it recognizes culture as a space of expression that can serve as a vehicle for value education, as long as it does not contradict core religious principles (Wahid, 2001; Hefner, 2000). In this study, da‘wah that “adapts to community conditions” reflects the logic of indigenization: da‘wah proceeds by considering economic conditions, social structures, and local religious orientations, producing a more stable and non-coercive transformation.

Cultural mediation further explains why local figures become crucial. Cultural mediation occurs when religious messages become effective because they are mediated by recognized authority and accessible symbols; narratives, myths, and traditions operate as

cognitive-affective bridges reducing distance between normative teachings and lived experience (Geertz, 1960; Hefner, 2000). Here, the roles of figures (including pioneers-founders and religious scholars) can be interpreted as providers of “channels of legitimacy”: they do not merely communicate doctrine, but organize social meaning so that Islam is accepted as part of collective identity rather than as an external element.

Analysis of Pesantren as an Educational Da‘wah Institution: Religious Habitus, Cadre Formation, and Scholarly Networks

In theories of the pesantren as an educational da‘wah institution, establishing educational structures (mosque—study circles—dormitories—pesantren) is understood as a da‘wah strategy oriented toward long-term sustainability. Pesantren operates through formal and informal education that forms religious authority, maintains tradition, and systematically reproduces religious values and practices (Dhofier, 1994; Steenbrink, 1986). Da‘wah through pesantren therefore is not merely communication, but institutionalization: Islamic teachings become a living social system through routines, regulations, and community leadership.

From practice theory, pesantren forms religious habitus dispositions embedded through repetition of worship practices, social discipline, etiquette, and consistent learning culture. Habitus makes religion present as a “way of life” that directs social action rather than knowledge that is merely known but not practiced (Bourdieu, 1990; Dhofier, 1994). Thus, when the data show mosque construction as an initial step followed by a simple dormitory and growing numbers of students, this sequence can be read as habitus formation: worship spaces and living spaces establish daily rhythms that normalize Islamic practice.

Pesantren can also be analyzed as a community of practice where religious identity forms through gradual participation: individuals learn not only from texts but from engagement in meaningful social practice and strong pedagogical relations (Lave and Wenger, 1991). This framework clarifies why *pengajian*, boarding, and close *kiai–santri* relations become effective da‘wah mechanisms: learning occurs through “social apprenticeship,” where students emulate etiquette, internalize discipline, and inhabit religious social roles through collective experience, rather than through episodic preaching alone (Steenbrink, 1986; Dhofier, 1994).

Finally, scholarly network theory emphasizes that pesantren is not an isolated local unit, but a node within broader intellectual circulation. Teacher–student networks, scholarly mobility, and the transmission of intellectual authority strengthen pesantren legitimacy and

enable the expansion of influence across generations (Azra, 2004; van Bruinessen, 1994). Through this lens, pesantren-based da‘wah constitutes cadre production (scholars/educators) that extends da‘wah reach: Islam not only “enters” a community but is reproduced into enduring scholarly traditions and religious leadership.

Conclusion

Based on the findings, Islam’s acceptance in Tremas can be understood as the result of cultural da‘wah operating through acculturation and cultural mediation. Mbah Ketok Jenggot appears as a *babat alas* figure who carried socio-symbolic authority through origin narratives, territorial opening, and the “Tremas” symbol (the golden *patrem*). These narratives functioned as a “cultural language” readily intelligible to the community, thereby producing early legitimacy, social space, and collective identity through which Islamic values could be introduced gradually. Subsequently, K.H. Abdul Manan developed da‘wah aligned with the local socio-religious context (including a population not yet fully Islamized), enabling Islamization to proceed persuasively and sustainably; this corresponds to indigenization principles that treat culture as a da‘wah medium as long as it does not conflict with Islamic values. The study further shows that K.H. Abdul Manan’s central strategy was to institutionalize da‘wah through pesantren development beginning with the mosque and *pengajian*, followed by dormitories and educational expansion. From pesantren theory, this strategy is effective because pesantren functions as a center for reproducing religious values and practices, ensuring that Islam does not stop at identity acceptance but becomes a stabilized pattern of life. *Pengajian* activities, student boarding, and learning environments cultivated a religious habitus (worship discipline, etiquette, and routine) that normalized Islamic practice in everyday life. Moreover, pesantren encouraged cadre formation through *kiai-santri* relations and scholarly traditions, and extended influence through wider scholarly networks that sustain knowledge transmission across generations. Therefore, K.H. Abdul Manan’s strategy can be characterized as long-term educational da‘wah: building institutions, shaping religious character, and preparing generational religious authority. The study recommends that local pesantren/NU leaders document and teach Tremas local narratives (origins, *babat alas*, symbols, and sites) as educational media so that tradition does not remain mere folklore but becomes a means for internalizing moderate and contextual Islamic values. It also recommends mapping living cultural practices in the community distinguishing which are socio-cultural (to be preserved), which require reinterpretation, and which should be

limited to ensure healthy acculturation, reduce interpretive conflicts, and strengthen da‘wah acceptance.

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