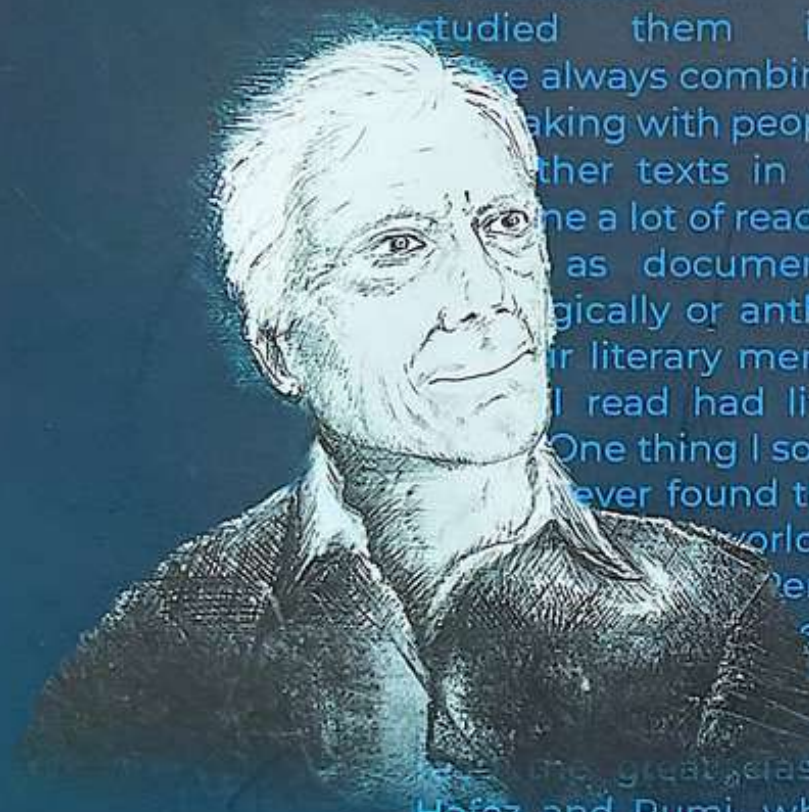




TRAJECTORIES OF INDONESIAN ISLAM

Festschrift in Honour of **MARTIN VAN BRUIJESSEN**

Edited by:

Farish A. Noor | Moch. Nur Ichwan | Lies Marcoes

My academic trajectory has taken many different places but very little was actually planned. What may have been career steps was mostly a matter of accident and unexpected opportunity. I sometimes feel that I have done too many different things to do any of them very well. Perhaps I should have concentrated on fewer subjects and studied them in greater depth. I have always combined field research with making with people, with reading and writing other texts in vernacular languages. I have done a lot of reading, but I treat most of it as documents to be examined ethnologically or anthropologically rather than for their literary merits – and many of the I read had little literary value. One thing I sometimes regret is that I never found the time to get to know the worlds of the society I was studying. Persian, for instance, I have read interviews and books on history but never found the time to read the great classical poetry of Hafez and Rumi, which would have given me much better knowledge of the language. In Indonesia, I learned something about the language but never the important literature or a work like the Serat Chandra Kirana. This is a great pity. Towards the end of his academic career, Martin van Bruinessen regretted having devoted himself to the study of Islam rather than Buddhism or Burmese Buddhism, or religious movements in Brazil, all of which he had studied in his student days. The fact is that I am quite happy with the way my life has taken, even though the turns were not deliberately planned.

Trajectories of Indonesian Islam

Festschrift in Honour of Martin van Bruinessen

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Edited by

Farish A. Noor, Lies Marcoes and Moch. Nur Ichwan

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The Transformation of a Conservative Pesantren in Indonesia: The Case of Pondok Ngruki

Muhammad Wildan

Muh. Fajar Sodik

Introduction

The Islamic Boarding School Al-Mukmin Ngruki, also known as Pondok Ngruki, has become an icon of conservative Islam in the context of religious and political developments in Indonesia. In the last few decades, especially during the early years of the *reformasi* (reformation) era, Pondok Ngruki had been associated with some cases of radicalism and terrorism that have occurred in the country (ICG Report 2002; Noor 2007; Wildan 2013). Various researchers, both local and international, have conducted studies related to the Islamic educational institution in the city of Solo (Surakarta). Several government institutions have also labeled this pesantren as a conservative or even radical institution. Some reports have even associated Pondok Ngruki with international terrorist networks such as Al-Qaeda (ICG Report 2002b). As a result of these developments, this particular boarding school came to be synonymous with the topic of radicalism and was even considered as a center or breeding ground for radicalism.

It has to be remembered, however, that the democratization process in Indonesia has had profound and multifaceted impacts on the nation's political, social, and economic landscape. Following the end of authoritarian rule in 1998, Indonesia embarked on a journey towards democratization, marked by free and fair elections, political pluralism, and an increasingly open civil society. One significant result of these processes has been the fostering of political stability and the creation of a more inclusive political system, that opened the way for more diversity, and for minority voices to be heard and

represented. This has contributed to a sense of empowerment among the citizens, promoting civic engagement and participation.

Challenges, however, persist, including issues of corruption and bureaucratic inefficiency. Socially and politically, democratization has encouraged greater respect for human rights, a more transparent and accountable framework of governance, the recognition of cultural diversity, and the fostering of economic growth. Despite these positive developments, ongoing efforts remain necessary in order to address the remaining challenges and to further strengthen Indonesia's democratic institutions.

This article tries to explore recent developments that have taken place at Pondok Ngruki, especially related to Indonesia's democratization process. We intend to show how Pondok Ngruki has experienced significant development not only internally and institutionally, but also in its involvement in the national socio-political realm. Some works - including books, journal articles and reports - have been done on Pondok Ngruki. Charlene Tan and Abudzar Al Qifari underline that the Islamic boarding school of Al-Mukmin Ngruki Solo has a modern curriculum that is accredited by the state. Therefore, besides religious subjects such as *aqidah* and *shari'ah*, its students also study "general subjects" such as mathematics, physical science, English language etc. (Tan 2011; Al Qifari et al. 2022). Meanwhile, Muhamad Murtadlo concludes that the stigma of radical pesantren attached to Pondok Ngruki cannot be detached from the global and local conditions at that time, and that Pondok Ngruki has made a lot of effort to reform the pesantren internally (Murtadlo 2017). However, none of the works above describe the recent development of the pesantren, especially its response to democratization of Indonesia and also the shifting ideology of Abu Bakar Ba'asyir.

Pondok Ngruki has had to shoulder the heavy burden of being labelled a den of radicalism. Along with democratization that continues to take root in Indonesia, the pesantren continued to undergo changes and adjust to social and political changes. This article will explore how this pesantren has been able to adapt to

modernity, and how these changes are reflected in its institutions, curriculum, and attitudes towards democratization, including responding to issues of radicalism and intolerance. By focusing on Pondok Ngruki as a case study, this article hopes to provide some insight into how Islamic educational institutions have adapted to the ongoing changes in Indonesia in the context of democratization and modernization.

Democratization and Religious Life in Indonesia

Along with the wave of democratization in many Muslim-majority countries, Indonesia, as the world's largest Muslim-majority country, has undergone significant political transformation in recent decades, marked by a transition towards democracy. The process of democratization, that gained momentum in the late 20th century, has had profound implications for various aspects of Indonesian society, such as religious freedom, pluralism, and political engagement (Hefner 2009).

Indonesia's democratic reforms, that began with the fall of authoritarian rule in 1998, has resulted in a greater emphasis on human rights and religious freedom. The post-Suharto era saw a shift away from centralized control over religious expression, resulting in a more pluralistic environment. The government has taken initiatives to promote openness and tolerance, allowing for greater religious variety and fewer incidences of faith-based discrimination. This transition has been reflected in the constitutional amendments and legal reforms that ensure religious freedom, allowing citizens to practice their faith without fear of persecution. The democratization of the country has also catalyzed efforts to enhance interfaith dialogue and understanding among Indonesia's diverse religious communities. Initiatives promoting religious pluralism have gained traction, with civil society organizations, religious leaders, university research centers, and governmental bodies actively engaging in efforts to bridge divides (Davidson 2018).

Religious groups have become increasingly involved in the political landscape of Indonesia as the country embraces democracy. Various Islamic and Islamist parties, such as the National Awakening Party (PKB), the National Mandate Party (PAN), the United Development Party (PPP), the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS), and others, have gained political representation, contributing to the country's democratic pluralism. While this has resulted in a more diverse and complex political scene, it has also raised new issues, such as discussions over the role of Islamic beliefs in administration. Balancing religious identity with the secular nature of the state is an ongoing effort, with political players managing the complicated interplay between democracy and religious principles. Undeniably, however, such democratic conditions have also brought about the emergence of some religious turmoil and disorder (McCoy 2013).

The impact of democratization on various aspects of public life in Indonesia has been evident, especially in the expression of cultural and religious identities. One visible influence is the shifting dynamics surrounding women's clothing, particularly the wearing of veils (Fealy and White 2008). As democratization evolved, a more nuanced approach to religious praxis emerged, allowing for greater individual freedom and choice in aspects of personal expression, such as the decision to wear veils. This shift represents a contrast from the totalitarian era when such decisions were frequently governed by the state's regulations. Furthermore, the progress of democratization has permitted the cohabitation of various lifestyles, permitting the establishment of Shariah banks and some other financial institutions that cater to the desires of an emerging Muslim consumer base. Thus, Indonesia's democratization has played a vital role in building an environment in which individuals have the freedom to express their religious and cultural identities in ways that are consistent with their values, contributing to a more pluralistic and inclusive public discourse (Hasan 2009).

Obviously, the democratization of Indonesia has had profound effects on the country's religious life as well, especially in terms of political engagement and religious freedom. While strides have been made towards inclusivity and tolerance, challenges persist in

balancing religious identity with the principles of a secular democracy. The ongoing dialogue and evolving dynamics between democratization and religious life in Indonesia has shaped the nation's socio-political landscape, reflecting the complexities inherent in navigating diverse religious beliefs within the framework of a democratic system.

The Conservative History of Pondok Ngruki

The Pondok Pesantren Ngruki is one of the most well-known Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia that has played an important role in the history of Islamic conservatism in the country. Founded in 1972 by several community leaders including Abdullah Sungkar, Abu Bakar Ba'asyir, Muhammad Amir, etc., Pondok Ngruki initially functioned as an Islamic educational institution that taught normative Islamic teachings (Noor 2007). Like other modern pesantrens, in its first years, it focused on the teaching of classical books, memorizing the Quran, and strong Islamic traditions. The founders, some of whom are alumni of Pondok Gontor, have colored the early characteristics of this pesantren (TM 2005).

Along with the New Order regime's repressive attitude towards Muslims at the end of the 1970s, Pondok Ngruki began to show resistance to the government and was inclined to be conservative. When the Pancasila was made the dominant ideology of the state via the Sole Principle policy (1985), the Pondok Al-Mukmin Ngruki and some other Muslim figures rejected it. This was aggravated by the arrest of several Muslim figures who explicitly rejected Pancasila including Abdullah Sungkar and Abu Bakar Ba'asyir. The government's increasingly harsh attitude towards Muslims was exacerbated by the emergence of cases such as the Komando Jihad (Jihad Command), 1978 (Muqoddas 2011), the Tanjung Priok massacre of 1984 (Akmaliyah 2009), the 'Bloody Talangsari' incident in Lampung, 1989 (Syukur 2003) and others. It was in this context that anti-government movements emerged including the joining of the two Pondok Ngruki figures to Sekarmadji M. Kartosuwirjo's

Darul Islam (DI) movement and also their exile to Malaysia at the end of the New Order era (Solahudin 2011).

During the exile in neighboring Malaysia, they were involved in many other conservative movements. Not only were they involved in Al-Qaeda activities along the periphery of Pakistan-Afghanistan, but they also established some international networks (ICG Report 2002). Later on, they detached their groups from the *Darul Islam* of S.M. Kartosuwirdjo and founded their own clandestine organization in 1993 namely *Jamaah Islamiyah* (JI). It was this underground organization that played a vital role in spreading conservative ideology across Indonesia, as well as in some other neighboring countries (Abas 2009). At the same time the emergence of this group brought about the internal disintegration of the Pondok Ngruki, that later on split into several other pesantrens (Nursalim 2001).

The downfall of the New Order government (in 1998) provided a window of opportunity for some conservative groups to emerge and create chaos in the country. The JI forces (which were already split in some pesantrens within the greater Surakarta area) were involved in some violent actions, that began with the Christmas Eve bombings (2000), and the Bali bombings of 2002 and 2005. Consequently, some of Pondok Ngruki's graduates and ex-pupils were involved in violent extremism. At the same time, Indonesian authorities accused Abu Bakar Ba'asyir of being the Amir (leader) of JI who was responsible for these bombing attacks. Naturally these incidents led to more attention being given to Pondok Ngruki, and the pesantren has been seen as the center of radicalism and even as the nest of terrorists.

The involvement of some alumni of Pondok Ngruki in radicalism reflects the complex dynamics in the development of Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia. It underscores the complexity of the challenges faced in maintaining a balance between strong religious traditions and the potential influence of radical ideologies. The Pondok Pesantren Ngruki became the subject of new reports in Indonesia and also internationally over the past few decades. News coverage of Ngruki often reflects several important issues relating to

Islam, education, and national security (Muharom 2014). This has prompted the Indonesian government and relevant agencies to increase surveillance and monitoring of pesantrens and religious schools to prevent the spread of radicalism.

The Transformation of Pondok Ngruki

The stigma attached to Pondok Ngruki as a radical pesantren was something that deeply concerned the members of the Yayasan Pendidikan Islam Al-Mukmin (YPIA), that was the custodian of the pesantren. Since the 2010s, the foundation of YPIA has demonstrated a firm commitment to addressing and reshaping the public image of pesantren as well as its teachers and students. The foundation embarked on a multifaceted awareness campaign to dispel these stereotypes, and to foster a more nuanced understanding of the institution and its activities. Through educational initiatives, community engagement, and open dialogue, the foundation of YPIA has worked relentlessly to highlight the complex and moderate nature of Pondok Pesantren Ngruki. The foundation has also been instrumental in implementing programs to mainstream pesantrens as educational institutions, to upgrade the educational level of the teachers, and to form a Council of Kyais (religious scholars) as the guardians of the educational process at the pesantren. The YPIA's dedication to dispelling misconceptions and promoting a more balanced and objective narrative has played an essential role in fostering a positive understanding and acceptance surrounding Pondok Pesantren Ngruki.¹

At the heart of this reform process was a strategic shift in the role of the foundation, which aimed to place a stronger emphasis on its educational mission. The foundation, as the custodian of the pesantren's vision and values, has been redefining its purpose in order to prioritize Islamic educational excellence and openness. One fundamental aspect of the reform is the effort to elevate the

¹ Interview with H. Taufiq Usman, MM., the director of YPIA, December 16, 2023.

educational standards of the teachers at Pondok Pesantren Ngruki. Recognizing that the quality of education is closely linked to the proficiency and dedication of its educators, the foundation has been encouraging all the ustadzs of the pesantren to continue their studies at the university level, either at the undergraduate or master levels. By investing in the continuous improvement of its teaching staff, the pesantren aims to foster an intellectually stimulating environment that encourages critical thinking, creativity, and a holistic approach to education.²

The YPIA foundation has taken the initiative to reform the Pondok Ngruki by establishing a higher educational institution named Sekolah Tinggi Islam Al-Mukmin (STIM). (That was established in 2012). Basically, STIM was meant to serve as a means to continue the educational activities of Ma'had 'Aly of Pondok Ngruki that was established in 1985. In the long run, the foundation aims to expand it further, for it to eventually become a well-known pesantren-based Islamic university.³ This visionary effort aims to elevate the educational standards within the Pondok system and provide a comprehensive platform for students to pursue higher learning. One of the key aspects of this reform process involves encouraging all ustadzs (Islamic teachers) associated with Pondok Ngruki to upgrade their academic qualifications at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. By facilitating the pursuit of advanced education, YPIA aims not only to ensure a higher standard of teaching within the Pondok but also hopes to contribute to the overall intellectual and spiritual development of the community at large.⁴ This strategic move aligns with the foundation's commitment to fostering a culture of continuous learning and enlightenment, fostering an environment

² Interview with H. Taufiq Usman, MM., the director of YPIA, December 16, 2023.

³ Further see <https://www.stimsurakarta.ac.id/profil-stim/>

⁴ Based on the data at the foundation of YPIA in February 2024, among the 160 ustadzs at various educational levels of Pondok Ngruki, approximately 60 (63%) of them have completed their S1 (bachelor's degree), 15 of them have completed their S2 (master's degree), and 4 of them have completed their S3 (doctorates). There are only about 40 (25%) ustadzs who have graduated from high school.

where knowledge and piety go hand in hand. The establishment of STIM and the encouragement of ustadz to pursue higher education reflect YPIA's dedication to creating a progressive and enlightened educational ecosystem within Pondok Ngruki. Currently, the STIM is trying to upgrade its institution by proposing a range of new study programs to the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs.⁵

The foundation of YPIA has embarked on a visionary journey to chart a comprehensive 20-year development blueprint for the foundation and all its affiliated institutions. This strategic initiative demonstrates YPIA's commitment to becoming a more accountable, fruitful, and impactful entity in the domains of education, social service, and preaching within the nation-state of Indonesia. The blueprint envisions YPIA as an ideal of educational excellence and a catalyst for positive social change. Through this forward-thinking approach, the YPIA foundation endeavors to align its mission with the evolving needs of the nation, ensuring that its contributions remain relevant, substantial, and beneficial to Indonesia. This initiative underscores the YPIA's dedication to long-term sustainable development, fostering a legacy of positive impact that extends far beyond the immediate present.

Furthermore, a central component of the reform is the establishment of *Dewan Kyai* (the Kyai Council) as the guardian of the educational process at Pondok Pesantren Ngruki. Comprised of experienced and esteemed scholars, the Kyai Council is intended to play a crucial role in shaping the curriculum, overseeing educational policies, and ensuring the alignment of the pesantren's teachings with contemporary knowledge and values. This council, whose members are chosen on the basis of their religious competency, is meant to act as a guiding force, providing wisdom and expertise to steer the educational journey of the students and the institution as a whole.⁶ Although the council at the moment is still in its early phase of

⁵ Interview with Sudarmaji Putra, M.Ud., the chief of STIM, November 9, 2023.

⁶ Interview with Ust. Muzayyin, the chief of Dewan Kyai of YPIA, December 16, 2023.

development, such awareness is quite significant for the future development of the pesantren. The pesantren requires such new perspectives in viewing and planning for the future.⁷

The reform not only seeks to modernize the educational praxis of Pondok Pesantren Ngruki but also aims to position it as a center of excellence that prepares its students for the challenges of the modern world while staying true to its Islamic heritage. By reinforcing the role of the foundation, enhancing the capabilities of the teaching faculty, and establishing the Kyai Council as guardians of the institution, the Pondok Pesantren Ngruki seems to be charting a course toward a future where it stands as a beacon of enlightened Islamic education and a source of inspiration for generations to come.

Religious Moderation and Democratization

In its strategic move towards openness and cooperation with the state, Pondok Ngruki has undergone a transformative shift, actively engaging with the government and various stakeholders. Recognizing the importance of fostering strong ties with governmental bodies and agencies, the leadership of Pondok Ngruki has initiated a process of increased transparency and cooperation. By establishing open lines of communication with government officials either at the local or national level, Pondok Ngruki aims to dispel any lingering stigma associated with the institution. This shift towards openness extends beyond mere communication and involves a proactive effort to seek financial support from the government.

The engagement with government bodies and stakeholders serves as a strategic response to address and mitigate any negative perceptions propagated by the media. By actively participating in open dialogue and collaboration, Pondok Ngruki has been repositioning itself as a responsible and accountable institution

⁷ Interview with Ust. M. Sholeh Ibrahim, S.Th.I., a member of Dewan Kyai, December 16, 2023 and online conversation with Dr. Muh. Nursalim, M.Ag., the secretary of Dewan Kyai of YPIA, January 8, 2024.

dedicated to its educational and social objectives while dispelling any unwarranted negative misrepresentations. Charlene Tan underlines that Pondok Ngruki is willing to accept the guidelines from the state to provide knowledge and skills that prepare its pupils for social and economic mobility. Moreover, the leaders of the pesantren are quite practical in recognizing the necessity of ongoing community support for student enrollment and engagement in school activities (Tan 2011, 59). This transformative approach has not only strengthened Pondok Ngruki's standing within the community, but also contributed to building a positive and inclusive narrative surrounding Islamic educational institutions in general. Interestingly, Robert W. Hefner found that some teachers at Pondok Ngruki were embarrassed about the involvement of some of its graduates in the Bali bombers, 2002 (Hefner 2009a). In the same way, when asked to respond to Islamic State of Iraq and Syria's (ISIS), call for the establishment of a caliphate, the late director of the pesantren replied that Pondok Ngruki would not hastily engage in such maneuvers and prefer to maintain its focus as an educational institution.⁸ The current director of the pesantren, Ustadz Yahya Abdurrahman confirms that Pondok Ngruki is presently quite active in many government activities, especially those organized by the National Counter Terrorism Agency (*Badan Nasional Penanggulangan Terorisme*, BNPT). Furthermore, he has stated that, unlike previous eras, currently Pondok Ngruki accepts financial help from the government.⁹

Embracing the democratic ethos of Indonesia, Pondok Ngruki has undergone a profound transformation by actively participating in civic activities aimed at national unity and promoting democratic values. As a significant display of openness and inclusivity, Pondok Ngruki celebrated its 50th anniversary by organizing the August 17 flag ceremony, a symbolic gesture of national unity on Indonesia's Independence Day in 2022. On this occasion, Ustadz Yahya (the director of the pesantren) stated that such a ceremony has been

⁸ See <https://news.detik.com/berita/d-2655070/ponpes-ngruki-tolak-isis>

⁹ Interview with Ust. Yahya Abdurrahman, Lc. the director of Pondok Ngruki, December 16, 2023.

practiced by Pondok Ngruki since 2021, but was previously not widely covered by the media.¹⁰ This event marked a transformative step for the institution, as it welcomed not only its students and staff but also esteemed guests, including the co-founder Abu Bakar Ba'asyir and the Minister of Education and Culture, Muhadjir Effendy. The presence of these influential figures at the ceremony underscored Pondok Ngruki's commitment to fostering a sense of national commitment within the Islamic educational community.¹¹ By actively involving key stakeholders and opening its doors to government representatives, Pondok Ngruki demonstrated its willingness to engage in dialogue and promote a narrative of collaboration between Islamic institutions and the Indonesian society in general. This event not only celebrated the history of Pondok Ngruki but also highlighted its evolving role as an inclusive and open educational institution within the democratic landscape of Indonesia.

Furthermore, the engagement of ustadzs of Pondok Ngruki in the general elections exemplifies its proactive role in democratic practice. Quite similar to the general election in 2019, before the general election in 2024, some ustadzs were involved in the discussions surrounding the necessity of the general election in Indonesia became a notable aspect of the political discourse. Some ustadzs engaged in a multifaceted conversation that extended across various social media platforms and practical forums, framing their participation as a form of "political jihad." The term "political jihad" was employed by these ustadzs to emphasize the significance of active political engagement within the framework of Islamic principles.¹² Although the discourse may still not come to the deep discussion of democracy or may just be at the practical level, this marked a significant shift in a community that was initially quite reluctant to

¹⁰ Interview with Ust. Yahya Abdurrahman, Lc. the director of Pondok Ngruki, December 16, 2023.

¹¹ See <https://www.kompas.id/baca/nusantara/2023/08/17/upacara-bendera-di-ponpes-al-mukmin-ngruki-bakal-digelar-setiap-tahun>

¹² See the sermon of Ust. Muzayyin on Islam politics in <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yMEEvHPX01U>

embrace democracy. Unlike the previous era, when most ustadzs considered general elections as problematic and disadvantageous (*madllarat*), today most ustadzs believe that general elections have some advantages and even urge santris and ustadzs to use exercise their right to vote for the sake of Indonesia in the future to come. The Ustadzs argued that participating in the electoral process was a means of upholding justice, promoting ethical governance, and safeguarding the interests of the Muslim community. This perspective contributed to a broader dialogue on the intersection of religious values and civic responsibilities, shedding light on the diversity of opinions within the Islamic community regarding political participation.

Recognizing the importance of political participation and civic responsibility, the more ustadzs were actively involved in discussions of politics, the more ustadzs were involved in the electoral process. By facilitating discussions on political literacy and voter education, Pondok Ngruki has been contributing to the vibrancy of the democratic system in Indonesia. This phenomenon is quite enthusiastic in some Whatsapp Groups of ustadzs and alumni of Pondok Ngruki suggesting the necessity of being actively involved in the upcoming general election to choose the future of Indonesian Islam. This transformation not only reflects the institution's responsiveness to the changing socio-political landscape but also underscores its commitment to producing well-informed and engaged citizens who play an active role in shaping the democratic future of the nation.

Aware of the stigma which is still quite strong, Pondok Ngruki tends to be open-minded. Therefore, the pesantren is quite active in many occasional meetings with local government as well as the military at the district level. On this openness and activeness of the pesantren, Ustadz Yahya affirms that its alumni have quite a wide range of occupations not only in the field of religious affairs but also in other aspects of life including serving as government civil servants, politicians, and even working in the police or military (Wildan and Nursalim (eds), 2021). On this matter, Robert W. Hefner also found that some of its graduates go to state universities and have ordinary

careers in business and education. Further, he discovered that the majority of Pondok Ngruki students are not radical (Hefner 2009a)

Ustadz Abu Bakar Ba'asyir

Ustadz Abu Bakar Ba'asyir, a prominent co-founder of Pondok Ngruki, has long been regarded as a key figure of conservatism and extremism in Indonesia. Known for his persistent adherence to orthodox Islamic values, Ustadz Abu played an important role in shaping the identity of Pondok Ngruki as an institution committed to preserving and promoting conservative Islamic teachings. However, in recent times, there has been a discernible shift in his ideology, marking a departure from the rigid conservatism for which he was once renowned.

After being imprisoned for about 15 years (2006-2021), Ustadz Abu's ideological outlook has evolved slightly, based on his understanding of contemporary challenges and his own willingness to adapt to the changing dynamics of the Islamic landscape. While he continues to uphold the fundamentals of Islamic principles, there is an obvious openness to dialogue and a more inclusive approach in his recent knowledge. This shift in ideology has sparked conversations and debates within both conservative and progressive circles in Indonesia. As the country navigates the complex interplay between Islam and modernity, Ustadz Abu's evolving ideology represents a pragmatic effort to address the needs and aspirations of a changing society. This transformation serves as evidence of the fluid nature of ideological perspectives and the potential for growth and adaptation, even in the case of such a figure who was associated with hardline conservatism.

Despite his age, Ustadz Abu serves as an influential spiritual leader within the pesantren community. His teachings and moral guidance continue to shape the character of the institution, ensuring that the spiritual fundamentals of Pondok Ngruki endures. Further, his journey in establishing Pondok Ngruki and his earlier involvement in the emergence of extremist Islamic activism in Indonesia, in general,

affirms his commitment to the proliferation of purist Islamic values. As Pondok Ngruki evolved over the years, Ustadz Abu also underwent a quite significant transformation. Interestingly, in 2022 Ustadz Abu attended, and was actively involved in, the August 17 flag-raising ceremony on the country's national day. In an interview that was conducted around that time he acknowledged the Pancasila as the basic philosophy of the state, although his interpretation of the first principle may be different from the state's general interpretations.¹³ Moreover, during the general election in 4 February 2024, Ustadz Abu was also actively involved not only in supporting the Anies-Muhamin's (AMIEN) presidential campaign, but he also exercised his right to vote the first time.¹⁴

On the shifting ideology of Ustadz Abu, the pesantren acknowledges this as good progress. Ustadz Yahya Abdurrahman adds that this transformation is partly due to the role played by his son Abdurrahim prior to his release from detention at Gunung Sindur. Further Ustadz Yahya declares that this is a more personal conviction and states that the pesantren accepted Pancasila quite a long time ago. On the role played by Ustadz Abu at Pondok Ngruki, he states that Ustadz Abu serves more as a spiritual leader.

In the meantime, the kind of Islamic activism that was developed by Ustadz Abu no longer prevails in the pesantren. (Though Ustadz Abu was either partly or fully involved in the creation of some conservative groups such as Jamaah Islamiyah (JI), Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia (MMI), and Jamaah Anshorut Tauhid (JAT).) In all of his struggles for Indonesian Islam, there were some followers within the pesantren. Today, however, most of the religious teachers at the pesantren do not seem to think that such forms of activism should be brought into the domain of religious education. Conversely, most of the ustadzs at Ngruki are of the opinion that the pesantren should be restored to its original identity and purpose, as an educational

¹³ Interview with Ust. Abu Bakar Ba'asyir, August 20, 2022.

¹⁴<https://www.cnnindonesia.com/nasional/20240115090044-617-1049472/abu-bakar-baasyir-disebut-dukung-anies-muhaimin-di-pilpres-2024>

institution. This is also supported by the fact that some prominent figures of JI dissolved the clandestine organization on 30 June 2024, and this was followed by some of its branches in the country.

Conclusion

To conclude, the Pondok Pesantren Ngruki has undergone a remarkable transformation over the past few years, moving on from its earlier association with extremist ideology to emerging as a dynamic educational institution. The concerted effort of the directors of the pesantren, as well as the foundation of YPIA (Yayasan Pendidikan Islam Al-Mukmin), have played a pivotal role in reshaping the institution's identity. With a renewed focus on education, Pondok Ngruki has actively embraced reform measures, emphasizing academic qualifications among its ustadz. The transition is evident in the composition of the teaching staff, where a significant number hold S1 to S3 degrees, showcasing a commitment to blending traditional Islamic education with modern academic qualifications. This transformation underscores the institution's dedication to providing a diverse and well-rounded learning environment that not only adheres to Islamic teachings but also aligns with contemporary educational standards.

Moreover, the collaborative spirit between the pesantren and the YPIA foundation extends beyond internal reforms, reflecting a broader engagement with governmental programs. The directors and educators have been actively participating in various government initiatives including those from the National Counter Terrorism Agency (BNPT), highlighting a commitment to contributing more positively to society. These changes are reflected in the shifting ideology of Ustadz Abu Bakar Ba'asyir who today has come to accept the ideology of Pancasila and who also attended the Indonesian Independence Day ceremony in 2022. This transformation not only fosters the integration of Pondok Ngruki into the broader educational landscape but also demonstrates a commitment to nurturing individuals who can contribute constructively to their communities. Through this multifaceted approach, Pondok Ngruki is not only rewriting its own history, but may also play a part in the creation of a new kind of Islamic educational institution that works for positive change in the future.

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