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Reconstructing the Culture of *Ta'ẓīm* and Seeking Blessings in Islamic Boarding Schools: A Comparative Study of Alumni Perspectives from NU, Muhammadiyah, and Persis Institutions

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Abstract:

This study examines the culture of ta'zim and Barokah in Islamic boarding schools as a socio-religious phenomenon historically, symbolically, and contemporary, while tracing its transformation in the context of liberating education. The culture of ta'zim and Barokah, which emphasizes students' respect for the kiai, has become the foundation of moral, spiritual, and social identity in Islamic boarding schools. However, in the modern era, a perception has emerged that this practice could become a feudal power relationship. This study examines how the dynamics of the meaning and practice of ta'zim and Barokah in Islamic boarding schools are transforming in the modern socio-religious context. This study uses a critical-phenomenological qualitative approach to examine the meaning of ta'zim and Barokah in Islamic boarding schools and the power relations that influence them. Data were obtained from 30 alumni of traditional, semi-modern, and modern Islamic boarding schools representing NU, Muhammadiyah, and Persis through online interviews and observations of phenomena. The analysis reveals the need for a pedagogical reorientation to ensure that ta'zim and Barokah remain relevant to modern Islamic education without compromising traditional values. The study's findings demonstrate that ta'zim (religious observance) is an undeniable socio-religious fact, serving as the foundation of morality, moral habitus, and social identity of students. Pedagogical transformation allows for the maintenance of respect for the kiai (Islamic scholars) while also transforming it into a liberating educational tool, fostering critical awareness, active participation, and social responsibility. This research emphasizes the relevance of ta'zim as an integration of Islamic boarding school traditions and modern education, while also providing a critical perspective for developing a humanistic, egalitarian, and spiritual teacher-student relationship.

Keywords: blessings; education; Islamic Boarding School; kyai; ta'zim.

INTRODUCTION

Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) are the oldest and most influential Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia (Rahman, 2016). They serve not only as centers for religious learning but also as spaces for students' character, moral, and spiritual education (Sadali, 2020). As traditional institutions, Islamic boarding schools emphasize the internalization of values of manners, ethics, and respect for teachers, specifically known as ta'zim. Ta'zim in the context of Islamic boarding schools is not merely formal respect, but rather an attitude of submission, respect, and appreciation of students towards the kyai as their scientific and spiritual guides, who are believed to be the inheritors of the knowledge of the prophets. These values form the moral and spiritual foundation of students, guiding them to subdue their egos, emulate their teachers' morals, and respect the knowledge they acquire, thus distinguishing Islamic boarding school education from modern educational institutions that emphasize rationality and student autonomy (Wirayanti, Erna, Cherawati, 2024).

Along with *ta'zim* (religious obedience), the Islamic boarding school tradition also emphasizes the concept of Barokah, a spiritual blessing believed to come through the presence of a pious kyai (Islamic teacher) and a reverent educational environment. Barokah is not only related to the spiritual dimension, but also to the moral and social; it forms the foundation for the formation of a social-student habitus that emphasizes obedience, responsibility, and collective awareness. The relationship between ta'zim and Barokah is symbiotic: respect for the kyai is believed to open access to blessings, both in terms of knowledge and in the development of the students' character (Ibrahim, n.d.) In this context, Islamic boarding schools function as moral laboratories, where morality, ethics, and spirituality are taught simultaneously through daily practices rooted in tradition.

However, in the modern era, the value of ta'zim and the concept of Barokah face complex challenges. Social transformation, information transparency, and demands for equality have shifted public perceptions of practices of respect and blessing. On the one hand, ta'zim is still viewed as a noble value that shapes the morality, spirituality, and identity of Islamic boarding school students (santri). On the other hand, the vertical nature of ta'zim practices is sometimes perceived as a restrictive power relationship, while Barokah is considered to have undergone capitalization, where spiritual symbols are exploited or misunderstood in the modern social context (Ekonomi, 2023).

Respect is not merely a matter of manners—it is an internalization of values: respect for knowledge, teachers, and spiritual processes, rooted in the traditions of Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*). A quantitative study at the Dar El-Himkah Islamic Boarding School in Pekanbaru showed that the pesantren's traditions significantly influence students' respect for teachers; the stronger the traditions, the higher the level of respect and obedience (Ahmad & Harahap, 2020). Other qualitative research within Islamic boarding schools identified manifestations of respect in various behaviors: giving teachers priority when walking, bowing when passing by, maintaining polite speech, and honoring teachers in daily interactions (Kh & Chalim, 2025).

This phenomenon can be seen in several viral cases that have surfaced in the mass media and social media. First, a kyai named Agus Malik from the Ciamis Islamic Boarding School distributed oranges to his students by kicking them. This practice drew public criticism because it was considered demeaning to students and deviated from the spirit of respect that should be embodied in ta'zim. This action demonstrated how the symbol of respect can be perceived as a form of feudalism, where students are placed in a passive position and completely subservient to the kyai, even though in the pesantren tradition the act is intended as an expression of closeness and spiritual blessing (Hidayatuloh 2024). Second, a gus named Elham became the focus of attention for kissing a girl during a religious study. Although in the internal tradition the act was intended as an expression of affection and a symbol of Barokah, the public viewed it as a misuse of spiritual symbols, so that Barokah in the modern context was perceived as having been capitalized. These two cases demonstrate the gap between the traditional meaning of ta'zim and Barokah and contemporary public interpretations.

Reverence is often complemented by a spiritual-cultural framework involving the hope of blessings—what in Islamic boarding school traditions is sometimes referred to as Barokah or Tabarukan. In a study at the Al Fiqhiyah Islamic Boarding School in Pasuruan, for example, students explained that respect for the kiai is a means of "ngalap Barokah"—receiving the teacher's approval, the blessing of knowledge, and spiritual and moral blessings (*Tadzim Santri Pada Kyai*, 2020). Meanwhile, theoretical literature examining the tradition of Islamic boarding school character education emphasizes that the value of ta'zim (religious tolerance) and its spiritual-moral aspects—including humility, self-reflection, and adab (ethics)—are integral to moral formation. Classical and contemporary approaches in Islam base character education on spiritual and ethical aspects, not merely cognitive ones (*Tadzim Santri Pada Kyai*, 2020).

However, the highly asymmetrical and authoritarian structure of the kiai-santri relationship in many Islamic boarding schools also opens up room for criticism. Several contemporary studies have shown that this relationship is not simply a transfer of knowledge and spirituality, but also a complex structure of symbolic and cultural power. A critical analysis of the pesantren tradition in East Java—the study Dismantling the Relationship between Kiai and Santri: A Critical Review of the Social and Cultural Dynamics of Pesantren in East Java—found that the kiai-santri relationship is built on a clear hierarchy, in which the kiai holds broad authority; however, this study also shows that santri sometimes negotiate their identity and autonomy, even within a patron-client structure (Achmadin, 2024). Another article, "Kyai as Moral Authority: Negotiating Religious Discipline and Cultural Identity in Pesantren," describes how the moral authority of the kiai influences religious culture in pesantren—through spiritual direction, moral guidance, and even strict control over aspects of the students' social lives (Titi Sartini, 2025).

The traditions of ta'zim and blessings in Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) exist at the intersection of moral-spiritual teachings and social power structures. Respect and blessings can be a means of internalizing noble values and spiritual discipline; however, on the other hand, these practices can be criticized as forms of domination, subordination, or even paternalism (Ibrahim, n.d.). This issue needs to be understood not simply as a deviation from individual behavior, but as a complex social and cultural construct. Ta'zim in Islamic boarding schools is a value formed collectively through repeated interactions between kiai, santri, administrators, and the surrounding community (Mubin, 2013). It becomes a moral habitus that structures the behavior and social identity of Islamic boarding school residents (Hidayat & Bakhri, 2024).

The phenomenon of shifting ta'zim in Islamic boarding schools—from forms of spiritual respect to social relations often considered feudal—indicates fundamental conceptual and practical problems within the traditional religious education system. Changes in the social context, developments in information technology (Rohani, 2024). and increasing public awareness of issues of equality and democratization in education have given rise to diverse interpretations of the practice of respect in Islamic boarding schools. On the one hand,bornis still considered a noble value that shapes the morals and character of students; however, on the other hand, its practice is sometimes perceived as legitimizing power relations that place kiai in a sacred and untouchable position (Ibrahim, n.d.).

This study aims to deeply understand the dynamics of the meaning and practice of ta'zim in contemporary Islamic boarding schools (pesantren), particularly how the value of respect for the kiai is transformed in a modern socio-religious context. This study seeks to contribute to the development of Islamic education and the sociology of religion by emphasizing the relationship between pesantren traditions, moral values, and social change. The study is expected to clarify how ta'zim, as one of the main pillars of pesantren education, functions not only as a form of ritual respect but also as a foundation for the formation of character, morals, and the social habitus of students. This study aims to explore the mechanism of ta'zim value transformation so that it can be understood within a collective-transformative framework, where respect for the kiai is maintained in substance, but does not give rise to rigid power relations or feudal practices. The findings of this study can serve as a conceptual foundation for developing a theory of pesantren education that bridges tradition and modernity, as well as provide a critical perspective on teacher-student relations in religious educational institutions.

Practically, this research aims to provide recommendations for Islamic boarding schools (pesantren), Islamic education administrators, and the wider community in managing the value of ta'zim (respect) to ensure it remains relevant and adaptive to current demands. This research is expected to help pesantren negotiate the practice of respect in a more dialogical and humanistic manner, so that the relationship between kiai (Islamic boarding school) and santri (students) is no longer perceived as a restrictive hierarchical relationship, but rather as an educational process that is mutually respectful, constructive, and empowering. Ta'zim in Islamic boarding schools can be analyzed as a complex interaction between cultural dimensions, social norms, and educational practices (Ibrahim, n.d.). The value of ta'zim is not merely an expression of ritual respect, but also shapes the social habitus of students, the structure of kiai-student relations, and the mechanism for internalizing moral values (Wirayanti, Erna, Cherawati, 2024). Understanding this phenomenon requires the integration of theories of cultural anthropology, sociology of religion and critical education, each of which offers a different but complementary perspective.

First Clifford Geertz's cultural anthropology perspective provides an analytical framework for socio-religious relations in Islamic boarding schools through categories santri, abangan, and priyayi. In the context of Islamic boarding schools, santri emphasize adherence to formal Islamic practices and respect for the kiai, while priyayi emphasize hierarchy, etiquette, and social legitimacy (Pulungan, 2003). Through Geertz's lens, the practice of ta'zim can be understood as a hierarchical cultural product, where the students' respect for the kiai is not only religious but also serves as a mechanism for reinforcing social and symbolic structures. In other words, ta'zim is a form of internalization of cultural values that shapes institutionalized power relations.

Both perspectives sociology of religion Émile Durkheim, ta'zim is social factswhich exists beyond the individual but regulates collective behavior. This social fact manifests itself through norms, rituals, and etiquette that systematically shape the social identity of students (Ratna Devi, Parmin, 2019). Durkheim's framework, the practice of ta'zim is not only a cultural tradition, but also a social stabilization mechanism that affirms the cohesion of the Islamic boarding school community. However, social transformations marked by the modernization of education, openness of information, and demands for egalitarianism have created tension between traditional social facts and the new norms of contemporary society. This phenomenon has given rise to the public perception that the practice of ta'zim can potentially become a feudal power relationship, resulting in a reinterpretation of the noble value of spiritual respect.

The relationship between these theories forms an integrated framework of thought. Geertz explain dimensions cultural-hierarchical which underlies the practice of ta'zim; Durkheim confirm dimensions normative and social collective which structures the behavior of students; provides dimensions critical and transformative education, which allows for the reinterpretation of ta'zim practices to remain relevant in the context of modernity. Ta'zim practices are understood not only as rituals of respect, but as multidimensional phenomena involving cultural interactions, social norms, and education, which must be reconstructed to support character building, strengthening social cohesion, and individual empowerment (Abdurrahmansyah, 2019).

This framework emphasizes that the transformation of ta'zim values must consider the traditions and cultural structures of Islamic boarding schools as historical-religious foundations; the social facts that structure the collective behavior and identity of students; and transformative educational practices that encourage dialogue, critical reflection, and humanistic respect. The integration of these three perspectives allows for a holistic analysis of the shifting meaning of ta'zim, from an expression of spiritual respect to a practice sometimes considered feudal, and opens up the possibility of a value reconstruction that maintains the religious substance and ethics of Islamic boarding schools while adapting to the demands of the times.

This research focuses on a literature review regarding the Islamic boarding school tradition. It is important for the author to include a literature review to avoid duplication of research as follows; First, Habibi, I.H. (2024). Abdi Dalem in Islamic Boarding Schools: A Phenomenological Study of the Meaning of Life of Students Who Serve the Kiai. FAJAR Journal of Islamic Education, 4(2), 65–78 (Habibi, 2024). In this study, Habibi explores the experiences of "abdidalem" subjects — students who dedicate themselves fully to a kiai — using a phenomenological approach. The main findings show that this devotion includes emotional elements (anxiety, sensitivity to the kiai), life commitment (loyalty, simplicity), and internalized values (patience, sincerity). This study is highly relevant because it provides an in-depth subjective picture of the psychological and existential aspects of the kiai-santri relationship, especially the dimensions of respect and devotion.

Second, Cahyono, C., Judijanto, L., Hutahaean, E.S.H., Nisa, U.W., Mulyadi, M., & Hosaini, H. (2024). Pesantren Education as Indonesia's Indigenous Heritage: Nurturing Moral Education in the Digital Era. At-Ta'dib, 19(1), 177–193 (Cahyono et al., 2024). This study examines Islamic boarding schools as a local heritage that remains relevant in the digital age, with a focus on character and moral education. The author emphasizes that Islamic boarding school education must adapt to the challenges of the times without eliminating traditional values such as respect, togetherness, and morality.

Third, Musaddad Harahap & MawardiAhmad (2022). The Relevance of Islamic Boarding School Traditions in Shaping the Attitude of Respect for Students at the DarEl-Himkah Islamic Boarding School in Pekanbaru City. At-Tarbiyyah Journal: Journal of Islamic Education, 6 (2). This quantitative study examines the influence of Islamic boarding school traditions on students' religious observance through simple linear regression. The results indicate that Islamic boarding school traditions have a significant influence on religious observance.

Fourth, Try Heni Aprillia, AgusHarisuddinMasrof, NurAhid, & SyamsulHuda (2021/2022). Pesantren and Tradition (Study of Ta'zim Affiliates in Character Education Al-Ghazali and Thomas Lickona). Edukasi Islami: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam, 12 (01) (Aprillia et al., 2023) This article is a literature review that links the tradition of ta'zim in Islamic boarding schools (especially at Al-Falah Ploso Islamic boarding school) to the character education theories of Al-Ghazali and Thomas Lickona. Researchers found that ta'zim in Islamic boarding schools is still "sublimated" in divine and humanitarian values.

Fifth, Hasyim Wibowo (2020). Ethics of Santri towards Kiai According to the Ta'lim Muta'allim Book at PP Kotagede Hidayatul Mubtadi-ien Yogyakarta. Panangkaran: Journal of Research on Religion and Society, 2020(04) (Lim et al., n.d.). This study reviews the ethical conception of santri towards kiai through the classic Ta'lim Muta'allim book in a pesantren in Yogyakarta, emphasizing that kiai is an exemplary figure who must be respected and santri show ta'zim through various social symbols (tabarukan, kissing hands, etc.).

Sixth, Ainul Fitriani (2019). Instilling the Attitude of Ta'zim in Shaping the Obedience of Students (Descriptive Study at Darul Abror Watumas Purwanegara Islamic Boarding School, North Purwokerto District). Thesis, IAIN Purwokerto (AINUL FITRIANI, 2019). This thesis describes how Islamic boarding schools instill an attitude of ta'zim (religious obedience) to shape students' obedience: adherence to schedules, boarding school rules, and internal codes of ethics. This research shows that ta'zim and obedience are correlated and considered important by Islamic boarding school administrators.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a critical-phenomenological design because this study aims to explore the deepest meaning of the concept of ta'zim and Barokah as experienced by alumni of Islamic boarding schools, while simultaneously criticizing the power structures that influence these practices. The phenomenological approach allows researchers to understand the experiences of the informants' consciousness as a whole as explained by (Moustakas, 1994) and (Van Manen, 1990) While the critical approach helps examine power relations and discourse construction as emphasized in the critical discourse analysis by (Fairclough, 2013) The focus of the research on salaf, semi-modern, and modern Islamic boarding schools helps to see how the institutional context and the evolution of tradition influence the meaning of ta'zim, especially in the era of contemporary Islamic education which is increasingly in contact with the flow of digital information and viral phenomena.

The research data sources consisted of thirty alumni of Islamic boarding schools representing backgrounds from Islamic religious organizations; NU, Muhammadiyah, and Persis. The selection of Islamic boarding schools with backgrounds aimed to gradually explore the typology and characteristics of the study objects. Meanwhile, the selection of informants was carried out randomly—orderly as explained by (Patton, 2015). The selection of data sources in qualitative research can be directed at subjects who are most capable of providing in-depth and relevant information based on certain categories; such as students who continue their education to higher education. In addition, there is a gender proportion in this case that needs to be discussed—because it presents different discourses and understandings of the research objects as intended. The selection of Islamic boarding school alumni (former students) was chosen because they are considered free from the power relations that are usually still attached to active students. Perceptions and interpretations of the practice of ta'zim and Barokah are more reflective. Data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews via Google Forms. The distribution of the interview questionnaire started from 1 – 10 December 2025—to ensure the consistency of the validity of the data, researchers conducted and continued communication online using WhatsApp randomly—periodically.

The analysis process uses an open and selective understanding of the informants' experiences. This analysis is combined with a critical discourse analysis approach (Fairclough, 2013) to uncover the social context, power structures, and possible distortions of meaning in the practice of ta'zim and Barokah, which often transform from spiritual customs into hierarchical symbols. The phenomenological reduction process is carried out according to the framework (Moustakas, 1994), while the interpretation of the informants' experiences is realized through reflective reading as understood by (Van Manen, 1990). This combination of phenomenological and critical approaches allows the research to reveal dimensions of meaning that are both spiritual and structural.

The validity of the data is maintained through triangulation of sources and methods as understood by (Denzin, 2009) and through member checking, namely ensuring that the researcher's interpretation is in accordance with the informant's experience as emphasized in qualitative verification practices (Rongcai et al., n.d.) The research follows ethical principles such as informed consent, anonymity, and sensitivity to differences in religious traditions, according to the ethical guidelines for qualitative research in (Schwandt, 2014) With this structured and layered methodology, the research is expected to produce a comprehensive, reflective and critical understanding of the meaning of ta'zim and Barokah and provide conceptual contributions to the renewal of modern Islamic education without eliminating the authenticity of the pesantren tradition.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Historical Study of the Relationship between Islamic Boarding School Culture and Ta'dim

A study of Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) in Indonesia shows that they are not simply religious educational institutions, but rather cultural entities deeply rooted in the social and religious fabric of Indonesian society. Their existence has been documented since the 13th century in Sumatra and the 15th century in Java, marking their emergence as centers of Islamic learning and local Islamic culture (Mustari & Rahman, 2012). The structure of Islamic boarding schools, which places the kiai as the central figure, the santri as followers, and the

yellow books as references, demonstrates how religious values and traditional culture are integrated into Islamic boarding school life. The cultural context of Islamic boarding schools consistently integrates the relationship between the kiai and the santri, understood as both familial and hierarchical. Studies show that the kiai is positioned as the "soul" of Islamic boarding school culture, while the yellow books and santri serve as complementary components in its transmission (Syafi'i Ahmad, 2011). This relationship then gave rise to a unique practice of respect—ta'zim—which involves the students showing respect, submission, and appreciation for the kiai as their spiritual and scholarly guide. This practice is not merely a social ritual, but part of the internalization of pesantren culture that helps shape the students' identity, discipline, and morals.

Expanding the history of the histography of Islamic boarding schools and the culture of ta'dim can be traced in the Ta'lim Muta'allim Book which contains clear etiquette guidelines for students in respecting the kiai, including through "tabarukan" or "ngalap Barokah" (Lim et al., n.d.). The practice of kissing the kiai's hand, walking behind him, or bowing when passing him has become a concrete symbol of ta'zim that continues to be practiced in many Islamic boarding schools. Contemporary socio-cultural dynamics have led to changes in the interpretation of this ta'zim practice. On the one hand, ta'zim as part of Islamic boarding school culture continues to be maintained as a mechanism for shaping the character of students—Fauzi's research found that Islamic boarding school culture remains a powerful medium for character education (Fauzi, 2023). However, modern social changes such as egalitarianism, access to information, and public criticism of hierarchy have given rise to the perception that the practice of ta'zim (religious observance) or Barokah (observance of blessings) can create rigid or even feudal power relations within Islamic boarding schools. Today, Islamic boarding schools are no longer isolated institutions, but rather evolving institutions that must adapt to the demands of the times (*Apologet terhadap Narasi Tunggal tentang Pesantren: Melihat dari Sejarah Kaya Kyai, Santri, dan Tradisi Asrama di Indonesia*, 2025).

Historically, the relationship between Islamic boarding school culture and the practice of ta'zim can be understood with the perception that it was initially formed within the framework of the Nusantara Islamic tradition that emphasized respect for ulama and teachers as key figures; then institutionalized within the structure of Islamic boarding schools that made kiai the center of spiritual authority, santri as respectful followers; then developed through books of adab and daily practices that embody ta'zim; and finally faced the challenges of social change that demand a reinterpretation of values to remain relevant without losing the richness of tradition (Nuruddin, 2025). This study shows that ta'zim or Barokah is not merely an empty ritual of respect, but rather part of the cultural habitus of Islamic boarding schools that regulates the behavior, social relations, and moral education of students. However, if the practice is not contextualized with social change and not critically reflected upon, the potential for excessive power relations to emerge as problematic in contemporary Islamic boarding school education (Yasid, 2018).

Redefining Ta'dzim and Barokah as Universal Values and Ethics

The positions of each alumni from different Islamic boarding school organizational backgrounds show significant variations in educational patterns: NU Islamic boarding school alumni are divided into salaf and semi-modern typologies; Muhammadiyah Islamic boarding school alumni consistently fall within the modern Islamic boarding school framework; while Persis Islamic boarding school alumni occupy two categories, namely semi-modern and modern. This typological structure provides an important analytical space to examine how the dynamics of tradition, modernization, and methodological approaches intertwine in influencing the meaning of ta'zim and Barokah by students.

Table 1. Basic proportions and typology

Basic Mass Organization	Typology	Male	Female	Total
NU	Salaf	3	3	6
	Semi- Modern	2	2	4
Muhammadiyah	Modern	5	5	10
Persis	Semi-Modern	2	2	4
	Modern	3	3	6
Total				30

Alumni of NU Islamic boarding schools, within the Salaf and semi-modern typologies, understand ta'zim as influenced by traditional culture, which places the figure of the kiai as the center of spiritual and intellectual authority. This perception aligns with Weber's theory of charismatic authority. Alumni of NU Islamic boarding schools, based on the Salaf typology, emphasize ta'zim as a form of ethical and emotional devotion manifested through symbolic adab and strong vertical relationships. The kiai is viewed not only as an educator, but as a provider of moral direction and a determinant of a more established spiritual sanad. Behaviors such as bowing the head, maintaining distance, speaking politely, and maintaining body position in assemblies are everyday expressions of ta'zim understanding. The embodiment of ta'zim in this context is embodied: it is present in the body, movements, gestures, and even the emotional rhythms of a student.

The culture of ta'zim (religious obedience) within Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) is one of the most distinctive and profound aspects of traditional Islamic education in Indonesia. Historically, this practice is not merely a ritual formality, but rather a manifestation of social, moral, and religious relationships that have been formed over centuries. In the context of Islamic boarding school education, ta'zim is internalized through a complex and lengthy process of solidarity. This position is legitimized by Durkheim, who argued that religious social facts are based on a deeply rooted proportion of solidarity (Durkheim, 2016) For Durkheim, solidarity is divided into two parts: mechanical and organic solidarity. This solidarity underlies the consistent practice of ta'zim among NU Islamic boarding school alumni—this is because many alumni of Islamic boarding schools continue to maintain gradual ties with the boarding school through territorial, geographical, and social ties. Solidarity The alumni of NU Islamic boarding schools consistently understand ta'dim in a relatively rigid, physical and symbolic axiology—where the epistemological framework of ta'dim is inherited through oral tradition, sorogan and observing actions or applications directly in Islamic boarding schools; thus strengthening the understanding that ta'dim is a symbolic "typical" culture. For Durkheim, norms, practices, and social structures that are collective are referred to associal facts, has an existence outside the individual and forces the individual to submit to it (Durkheim, 2016). The culture of ta'zim is understood as the subjective experience of students who internalize religious values and moral ethics. The practice of kissing the kiai's hand, bowing the head, or walking behind the teacher are expressions of profound religious experience (SAFIQ, 2024). Phenomenology emphasizes the importance of understanding phenomena from the perspective of the perpetrator (Rorong, 2020) This means that ta'zim is not merely a formal ritual, but a medium for shaping the spiritual awareness of students. Students feel and internalize the values of respect, submission, and exemplary behavior. This practice forms a religious identity inherent in their subjective experience (Takdir, 2018) This experience is transcendental because it is not limited to external actions, but penetrates into consciousness, shapes character, and guides daily behavior within the pesantren community.

Through Max Weber's theoretical framework, he emphasized that ta'zim is a means of legitimizing the authority of the kiai (Weber, 2019). identified three forms of authority—traditional, charismatic, and legal-rational—which in the context of Islamic boarding schools, are primarily seen in the form of charismatic authority. The kiai possesses charisma that is collectively recognized as a symbol of knowledge, spirituality, and morality. The practice of ta'zim and Barokah becomes a medium for affirming this authority, through which students express their recognition and obedience to the hierarchical structure of the pesantren (Titi Sartini, 2025) The kiai's authority, through the practice of ta'zim, not only functions as a tool of social control, but goes beyond a simple physical framework that emphasizes the mechanisms of moral and religious formation of students. The emotional and spiritual bond that arises from the kiai-student relationship strengthens community cohesion, affirms the value of solidarity, and facilitates the reproduction of religious values from generation to generation (Yasid, 2018).

Clifford Geertz emphasized that religion and religious practices are symbolic, and cultural meaning must be understood in the context of the symbols that exist in society (Geertz, 1976). The culture of ta'zim in Islamic boarding schools is a clear example of this symbolic systems that codify social relations. The tradition of kissing the kiai's hand or bowing one's head not only signifies a power relationship, but also expresses respect for the teacher's knowledge, spiritual experience, and wisdom (Yasid, 2018). This practice has become a moral and ethical symbol that is historically embedded in the cultural context of Javanese and Nusantara society, where respect for teachers or elders is a customary value internalized in everyday life. Thus, ta'zim isacculturation products of local religious and customary values, which produces a form of morality and ethics typical of Islamic boarding schools (Kh & Chalim, 2025).

For Durkheim, this phenomenon refers to a social fact that cannot be delegitimized. Its existence becomes a symbol that must be subconsciously affirmed and ratified. This means that ta'zim issocial facts that have objective existence and coercive power (SAFIQ, 2024) The norm of respect for kiai is accepted as a binding collective rule, so that violation of this norm can lead to social pressure or stigma. The social fact of ta'zim reflects

the collective consensus of the pesantren regarding what is considered right and proper in the teacher-student relationship (SAFIQ, 2024). This fact confirms that ta'zim is not merely a formal ritual, but an instrument that maintains social cohesion, morality, and the continuity of religious values. In this case, students not only obey outwardly, but also internalize the values as part of their moral habitus and social identity (Habibi, 2024).

From a contemporary perspective, modernization, globalization, and the development of information technology have brought challenges to the practice of ta'zim. Egalitarian culture, critical awareness, and demands for active participation in education have given rise to the perception that the practice of hierarchical respect can be feudal or restrictive (Titi Sartini, 2025). However, from a phenomenological, sociological, and anthropological analysis, this does not erase the fact that ta'zim remains a socio-religious fact with objective existence. This practice continues to be a medium for internalizing moral and religious values., (Hidayat & Bakhri, 2024) although it may undergo adaptations in the form of more dialogical and contextual behavior. Phenomenology emphasizes that the meaning of ta'zim must always be understood from the experiences of students, so that social adaptation does not eliminate the religious and moral substance of this practice (Yasid, 2018).

This multidisciplinary analysis demonstrates that the culture of ta'zim has historical, symbolic, social, and religious dimensions. Historically, this practice emerged from the acculturation of Islamic religious values and local customs, shaping the character and morality of students (santri). Symbolically, it affirms the kiai-santri relationship and community cohesion. Socially, it creates a hierarchical structure that facilitates the internalization of moral and religious norms. And religiously, this practice forms a transcendental experience that guides students toward spiritual and ethical awareness. Therefore, ta'zim is not merely a formal custom or ritual, but a socio-religious fact that is integral and inseparable from pesantren life.

Efforts to interpret or change the practice of ta'zim must consider its historical, symbolic, and religious dimensions. Ta'zim remains relevant as a pillar of moral and religious education, as well as a social fact that binds the pesantren community. Phenomenological, sociological, and anthropological approaches, combined with the theories of Weber and Durkheim, emphasize that the culture of ta'zim is a living historical legacy that continues to shape the identity, morality, and social structure of the pesantren community; it must be interpreted with the transformative and liberating educational values of Poulo Friere (Norvaizi, I., & Anggita, 2025).

The perception of NU Islamic boarding school alumni who consistently define ta'dim within a relatively rigid category space; this is based on the assumption that the proportion of solidarity is built on Weber's charismatic image. This solidarity forms a social framework that unwittingly confirms Durkheim's theory of religious social facts (Durkheim, 2016). In contrast, alumni of NU Islamic boarding schools, based on the semi-modern typology, maintain a deep respect for the kiai, but their expression is more functional and educational. Physical respect is no longer the primary determinant of adab quality; what is more valued are the ability to maintain ethics in discussions, academic politeness, and humility when receiving knowledge. This change demonstrates that institutional modernization does not erase traditional roots and transforms forms of ethics that are more contextual to educational needs. NU Islamic boarding school alumni from both typologies still connect the Salaf tradition with semi-modern adaptations, so that ta'zim can be understood as a flexible value but still rooted in hierarchical respect.

The construction of ta'zim (religious guidance) within the alumni landscape of Muhammadiyah Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) shows a more egalitarian and rational pattern. The perception of ta'dim depicts the teacher-student relationship as a professional one built on mutual respect. Teachers are respected not because of their position as charismatic figures, but because of their competence, intellectual capacity, and moral integrity. Ta'zim is not manifested in the form of physical symbols, but rather in the discipline of learning, respect for time, orderly academic administration, and the ability to maintain intellectual ethics such as honesty and accuracy of citations. This interpretation demonstrates that modernity brings a paradigm shift from the kiai as a sacred figure to the teacher as a professional educator. The change in the ta'zim model within Muhammadiyah represents the integration of Islamic values with modern principles such as rationality and efficiency.

Meanwhile, the meaning of ta'zim in the context of alumni of Persis Islamic boarding schools, both semi-modern and modern, shows a stronger epistemic character than the other two mass organizations. Ta'zim is a respect for the authority of knowledge, not for the personification of the teacher. Respect is given when the teacher is able to demonstrate strong arguments, the validity of the evidence, and methodological consistency. The teacher is respected to the extent that he represents the integrity of the manhaj and the accuracy of religious understanding. In contrast to alumni of semi-modern Persis Islamic boarding schools, ta'zim appears in the form of academic discipline and regularity in learning. In the modern type, ta'zim is even more prominent as an attitude of adherence to scientific methodology, thoroughness in understanding texts, and the ability to avoid logical

errors. Thus, in Persis Islamic boarding schools, ta'zim becomes an epistemic value that emphasizes cognitive accuracy rather than emotional or traditional relationships.

The concept of Barokah exhibits no less significant differences in articulation. Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) Islamic boarding school alumni tend to interpret Barokah as a spiritual dimension that flows through the intermediary of the kiai (Islamic teacher). This tradition is particularly strong in the Salaf typology, where Barokah is depicted as a widespread blessing born of obedience, etiquette, and closeness to the teacher. In contrast to the semi-modern typology, the meaning of Barokah is shifting toward an integration of more relevant spiritual values: Barokah is obtained through good intentions, ethical learning, and sincerity. This transformation demonstrates that Barokah remains a spiritual element, but it is no longer purely mystical; it emerges as a result of the interaction between morality and real effort.

Alumni of Muhammadiyah Islamic Boarding Schools integrate the meaning of Barokah as the social utility of knowledge and its practical urgency. Barokah is not understood as something obtained instantly, but as the fruit of hard work, integrity, discipline, and devotion. Here, knowledge is understood as a means to bring about social change, address community problems, and has axiological value; not apologetic. The concept of Barokah for alumni of Muhammadiyah Islamic boarding schools is both productive and practical. This understanding aligns with the principles of tajdid and the formal mass of Sustainable Islam.

Unlike Muhammadiyah, Persis Islamic boarding school alumni understand Barokah as a breadth of benefits stemming from the truth of the teachings and methodological accuracy. They understand it more fundamentally, but avoid cultishizing the tradition of sacralizing figures. Barokah is not linked to the personalization of teachers. Its practice is rooted in the prophetic application of religious teachings. Barokah is epistemic. This perspective places Barokah within the framework of purifying teachings, making the normative aspect more prominent than the interpersonal spiritual aspect.

When read holistically, it appears that ta'zim and Barokah, despite differing expressions and epistemological foundations, are still considered fundamental values in Islamic boarding school education. This framework of understanding is differentiated within the realms of interpretation and epistemology; but more broadly, it orients toward a noble and universal understanding of ethics and values.

The Controversy of Ta'zim and Barokah: A Critical Review

The majority of alumni reject viral phenomena depicting controversial practices, such as clerics kicking oranges during religious study sessions or Gus kissing children as a pretext for ta'zim and blessings. Alumni from all Islamic boarding schools and mass organizations agree that such practices do not reflect ethics as a spiritual path. Alumni of NU Islamic boarding schools, based on the Salaf typology, emphasize that this viral phenomenon is not part of the theoretical epistemic teachings of ta'zim. The epistemological understanding of ta'zim lies within an epistemological realm rooted in cultural traditions and interpretations alone. The majority of alumni understand that blessings are not related to extreme physical actions, but arise from sincerity in learning and practicing knowledge. There is also a perception that the viral phenomenon is a "joke" and illustrates the closeness between educators and students.

A different response came from alumni of Muhammadiyah Islamic boarding schools, who understood the phenomenon within the framework of transformative education—which liberates from the shackles of oppression and slavery. The viral phenomenon was understood as unfounded and epistemologically flawed. The alumni of the Islamic boarding schools clearly illustrated that this position lacks a source and does not comprehensively reflect Islamic ethics and morals. The framework of ta'dim and Barokah should be based on fundamental sources, and how ta'zim and Barokah should be applied in public discourse.

Critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2013) shows that social media framing can change collective perceptions of religious practices, while Durkheim's socio-religious fact framework asserts that episodic or viral practices cannot be considered valid social norms (Durkheim, 2016) Female alumni of a Modern Islamic boarding school assert that Barokah should be understood as the result of practicing knowledge and morality, not as symbols or extreme physical rituals. This phenomenon emphasizes the need to reorient the meaning of Barokah, in order to maintain a sincere relationship between students and teachers, and prevent feudal cultural distortions.

Reinterpretation of Ta'zim and Barokah in a Modern Context

Interviews revealed a collective awareness among alumni of semi-modern and modern Islamic boarding schools that the practice of ta'zim (religious practice) must be reconstructed to be relevant to higher education, professional contexts, and global values without erasing its traditional roots. A Persis alumni from a modern Islamic boarding school asserted, "True blessings arise from the success of applied knowledge, not symbolic

rituals. Ta'zim remains important, but it must be relevant to equality and pedagogical principles." Alumni of NU and Muhammadiyah Islamic boarding schools added that the principles of tawadhu' (respect for knowledge), respect for knowledge, and moral nobility must be maintained, while physical or symbolic forms can be modified to suit the modern context. The critical phenomenological approach asserts that the practice of ta'zim can be reconstructed as an experience that internalizes moral and spiritual values, while reducing the risk of rigid power hierarchies (Moustakas, 1994; Fairclough, 2013). Geertz's (1973) symbolic perspective suggests that the symbol of ta'zim remains relevant as a cultural identity of Islamic boarding schools, but must be interpreted contextually to prevent it from becoming symbolic feudalism. According to Durkheim (1915), socio-religious facts affirm that practices collectively accepted as moral norms are more valid than episodic or viral practices. Thus, the reinterpretation of ta'zim and Barokah allows Islamic boarding school education to remain relevant in the modern era without losing the core values of tradition and spirituality.

The Perception of the Ta'zim Culture of Islamic Boarding Schools as a Feudal Legacy

The culture of ta'zim in the Indonesian Islamic boarding school environment has strong historical roots. Since the founding of Islamic boarding schools as traditional Islamic educational institutions in the archipelago, respect for religious teachers (kiai) is not merely a form of politeness, but an integral part of the structure of religious education, scientific ethics, and the formation of the character of students (Takdir, 2018). Anthropological and sociological perspectives state that ta'zim emerged as a habitus—a value structure embedded in Islamic boarding school culture—where students position themselves in a civilized relationship with the kiai and the inherited system of knowledge. However, in contemporary developments, the practice of ta'zim and Barokah has begun to be questioned in public discourse as a "legacy of feudalism" of Islamic boarding schools (Reinterpretasi et al., 2025). The term feudalism refers to an ancient socio-political system, particularly in medieval Europe, characterized by land ownership, rigid social castes, and relations and subordination passed down through generations (Meri Erawati, 2025). This accusation arises when certain acts of respect—such as students walking behind the kiai, kissing his hand, or providing services or work to students without equal compensation—are perceived by the public as an inegalitarian power relationship (Mulkhan, 2003). For example, media opinion pieces have suggested that "neo-feudalism in Islamic boarding schools" has become a negative narrative about the culture of respect for kiai (M. Ainul Budi, 2025).

Historical analysis shows that although there are elements of vertical relations in Islamic boarding schools, the basic character of ta'zim is conceptually different from classical feudalism. The culture of respect in Islamic boarding schools is based on the values of knowledge, manners, purity of heart, and a mentor-mentor relationship between teacher and student, not class domination over subordinate classes (Takdir, 2018). An opinion article stated that "feudalism was born in the West, ta'zim in Islamic boarding schools" and emphasized that equating the two is an epistemological error (*Feodalisme Lahir dari Barat, Tadzim Tumbuh di Pesantren*, 2025) The analytical side shows that certain conditions can give rise to configurations similar to feudalism in Islamic boarding school practices. International and local studies indicate that when respect for kiai is not accompanied by space for dialogue, criticism, and autonomy of students, the potential for the emergence of a strong symbolic and structural hierarchy becomes apparent. M. Rahcman Masyhudi's study of feudal elements in Islamic boarding schools shows that some patterns of Islamic boarding school relations have analogies with feudal structures: the descendants of the kiai as heirs to power, the santri as obedient followers, and little room for social mobility (Abdul Rahcman Masyhudi, 2000).

The sociological perspective of religion on Islamic Boarding Schools and the Accusation of Feudalism" is believed to stem from criticism of the culture of ta'zim often born from public perceptions that compare the traditional structure of Islamic boarding schools with the egalitarian values of modern society. In this context, the structure of ta'zim and Barokah can be read as a social fact, as understood by Durkheim, that structures students' behavior within the framework of social fact theory. However, if not managed critically, this relationship can strengthen symbolic domination and give rise to the external stigma that Islamic boarding schools are conservative and hierarchical institutions (Takdir, 2018).

The historical perception of the culture of ta'zim and Barokah as a legacy of feudalism has several important consequences: first, a cultural conflict arises between traditional values of respect and the demands of egalitarian modernity; second, a crisis of legitimacy emerges for Islamic boarding schools when ta'zim practices are deemed irrelevant or contradictory to contemporary educational norms; and third, it reinforces the importance of reconstructing values that maintain etiquette and respect without sacrificing space for dialogue, student reflection, and active participation. One article states that the "crisis of empathy for Islamic boarding school

culture" arises because the general public is quick to make the vertical form a symbol of oppression, without understanding the context of etiquette and knowledge in Islamic boarding schools (*Feodalisme Lahir dari Barat, Tadzim Tumbuh di Pesantren*, 2025).

The culture of ta'zim in Islamic boarding schools has two faces: as a positive legacy that shapes discipline, morals, and respect for knowledge; and as a potential power structure if not reflected with contextual awareness (Abdul Manap, S. E., MM, M., Adi Rosadi, S. P. I., Mohammad Lisanuddin Ramdlani, S., Muhammad Junaedi Mahyuddin, S. P., & Nurliani Siregar, 2025). This historical study shows that to address the perception of feudalism, Islamic boarding schools need to undertakedeep reconceptualization—internalizing the values of adab and respect in a form that remains dialogical, transparent, and responsive to the demands of modern education—without losing the identity of the scientific tradition. Thus, the historical perception of ta'zim culture as a legacy of feudalism is not a simple navigation: it invites efforts to recontextualize pesantren culture to keep it relevant, inclusive, and transformative.

The Culture of Ta'zim and Blessings of Islamic Boarding Schools as a Social and Religious Fact

The culture of ta'zim (reverence) in Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) is one of the most distinctive and profound aspects of traditional Islamic education in Indonesia. Historically, this practice is not merely a ritual formality, but rather a manifestation of social, moral, and religious relationships that have been formed over centuries. In the context of Islamic boarding school education, ta'zim is internalized through a long socialization process, in which students learn to subdue their egos, respect knowledge, and emulate the morals of their teachers. This phenomenon aligns with Emile Durkheim's thinking, which emphasizes the collective nature of social norms, practices, and structures, which he calls social facts, has an existence outside the individual and forces the individual to submit to it (Durkheim, 2016).

The culture of ta'zim is understood as the subjective experience of students who internalize religious values and moral ethics. The practice of kissing the kiai's hand, bowing the head, or walking behind the teacher are expressions of profound religious experience (SAFIQ, 2024). Phenomenology emphasizes the importance of understanding phenomena from the perspective of the perpetrator (Rorong, 2020). This means that ta'zim is not merely a formal ritual, but a medium for shaping the spiritual awareness of students. Students feel and internalize the values of respect, submission, and exemplary behavior. This practice forms a religious identity inherent in their subjective experience (Takdir, 2018). This experience is transcendental because it is not limited to external actions, but penetrates into consciousness, shapes character, and guides daily behavior within the pesantren community.

The Historical Culture of Islamic Boarding School Religious Education from Clifford Geertz's Perspective

Islamic boarding schools, as Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia, have a long history embedded in the social, cultural, and religious dynamics of Indonesian society. One practice that has become a key characteristic of Islamic boarding schools is ta'zim and Barokah, namely deep and ritualistic respect for the kiai. This practice is not merely a social formality, but is a reflection internalization of moral, ethical, and spiritual values which shapes the identity of students as individuals and as part of the Islamic boarding school community (Yasid, 2018). Clifford Geertz provides a strong theoretical framework for understanding the historical dynamics of the culture of ta'zim and Barokah. He emphasized that the Santri community has a dominant religious orientation, placing religion as the center of social and moral life (Geertz, 1976). The context of the Islamic boarding school and the students can be understood as the main actors in the practice of ta'zim and barokah. Both are taught to respect the kiai as a charismatic figure who possesses spiritual and scientific authority, so that the relationship between students and kiai forms internalized moral and ethical structures. This relationship also reinforces Weber's analysis of how charismatic authority manifests (Weber, 2019).

The ritual and moral dimensions, the practice of ta'zim and Barokah also reflecthistorical social structure of Javanese society (Geertz, 1976) shows that Javanese social stratification is divided into three categories: Santri, Abangan, and Priayi. Religious Santri conceptually and practically support the practice of ta'zim, internalize religious norms and respect the authority of the kiai as a moral figure. The Priyayi, as a bureaucratic class and social elite, influence the hierarchical leadership pattern of pesantren, in which the kiai has a central role as the holder of structural legitimacy. Abangan, who emphasize more on customary acculturation and religious flexibility, often interpret the practice of ta'zim as a symbol of rigid or excessive power (Geertz, 1976). The historical interaction of these three groups confirms that the culture of ta'zim is complex products of local history, religion, and culture, while also being the object of different perceptions by broader social groups (Ainul Fitriani 2019).

The culture of ta'zim was also influenced by political and social developments in the archipelago. During the colonial period, Islamic boarding schools functioned asIslamic preservation center, while simultaneously affirming

the authority of the kiai as a moral figure who plays a role in maintaining the unity of the Muslim community. In this context, ta'zim becomes a symbol of religious solidarity, as well as a mechanism for strengthening the social hierarchy within the pesantren community (Abdul Rahcman Masyhudi, 2000). Kiai are seen as inheritors of the knowledge of the prophets, so respect is not merely a formality, but an integral part of moral and religious education. This practice serves as an internalization mechanism of values, which forms the habitus of santri and distinguishes them from the general community, who may not have as strong a religious orientation as santri (Takdir, 2018) Geertz's perspective leads to the understanding that ta'zim is not merely a form of power hierarchy, butthe mechanism for forming the religious and moral identity of Islamic boarding school students. This practice serves as a medium for the socialization of norms and character formation consistent with Islamic tradition and Javanese culture (Geertz, 1976). This culture of respect allows Islamic boarding schools to continuously transmit moral values, building a santri habitus that combines piety, social ethics, and adherence to moral structures.

Contemporary research shows that ta'zim also functions as a social adaptation mechanism. Despite facing modern criticism regarding equality and the democratization of education, the practice of ta'zim can be reinterpreted within a more humanistic and dialogical framework, without losing its moral and spiritual substance. This approach emphasizes that the historical culture of Islamic boarding schools is flexible, able to adapt to social change, while still maintaining its historical roots and religious values that have been passed down through generations. In-depth analysis through the perspective of Clifford Geertz confirms that ta'zim in Islamic boarding schools is historical cultural heritage. A complex system that combines religious, moral, and social dimensions. It is not simply a symbol of domination, but a mechanism for the formation of identity, the internalization of values, and the moral reproduction of students. The changing perceptions of modern society must be understood as a new social dynamic that does not erase the historical substance of ta'zim but rather demands a reinterpretation that respects the cultural roots and moral values of Islamic boarding schools.

CONCLUSION

Based on an in-depth study of the culture of ta'zim (reverence) in Islamic boarding schools, it can be concluded that the practice of respecting kiai (Islamic scholars) is an inherent and irrefutable socio-religious fact. Ta'zim, as a historical and cultural heritage of Islamic boarding schools, functions not only as a symbolic ritual but also as a medium for transmitting moral, spiritual, and intellectual values that shape the students' identities. Phenomenological analysis shows that the students' experiences in practicing ta'zim are reflective; each act of respect holds subjective meaning that serves as the starting point for critical awareness. The sociological approach asserts that ta'zim is a social regulation that governs interactions within the Islamic boarding school community. Within Durkheim's framework, this practice is a social fact that strengthens collective solidarity and shapes the moral habitus of students. Meanwhile, the anthropological perspective emphasizes that ta'zim is a cultural expression rich in symbols, reflecting the historical relationships and traditional values of Islamic boarding schools. This culture continues to evolve through the internalization of values and rituals, remaining relevant despite modern social dynamics.

The integration of Paulo Freire's perspective on liberatory education emphasizes the transformative potential of ta'zim practices. By adopting dialogical, reflective, and problem-posing principles, ta'zim is no longer understood merely as a form of vertical obedience, but rather as an educational medium that empowers students. This transformation opens up space for students to actively participate, develop critical awareness, and link the values of respect with social responsibility and self-development. Thus, ta'zim maintains the authority of the kiai as a moral and spiritual symbol, but also functions as a liberating educational instrument. This overall study confirms that the culture of ta'zim in Islamic boarding schools has a dual relevance: first, as a socio-religious fact that shapes the identity and traditions of Islamic boarding schools; second, as an educational medium that can be internalized in critical and reflective practices, in accordance with the principles of liberatory education. The transformation of ta'zim, grounded in dialogue, reflection, and empowerment, ensures that Islamic boarding schools remain adaptive to the challenges of modernity without losing the substance of tradition. Therefore, the culture of ta'zim can be understood as a living, symbolic, and pedagogical historical practice—connecting traditional, moral, and spiritual values with a liberating educational process. This conclusion confirms that this research not only contributes to the study of the sociology of education and the anthropology of Islamic boarding schools, but also emphasizes the relevance of integrating traditional practices with critical educational theory, as a model for empowering educational transformation in the context of modern Indonesian Islamic boarding schools.

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