

Symbolic Meanings in the Social Interaction of *Santri* in the *Pesantren* Environment

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ABSTRACT: *This study examines the symbolic meaning of students' social interactions with ustadz, teachers, fellow students, and parents at the Muhammadiyah Boarding School Al-Manar South Sumatra. Using a descriptive qualitative approach based on case studies, this study used observation, interviews, and documentation as data collection techniques. Analysis techniques included coding and categorizing the collected data to identify related patterns and themes. This study's findings revealed that students' interactions with ustadz and teachers are symbolized by bowing and kissing the hand, reflecting respect, religious obedience, and social hierarchy. These traditions strengthen the cultural and spiritual bonds between students and their teachers. Among fellow students, calling each other akhi (brother) and ukhti (sister) symbolizes respect, unity, and leadership development. These interactions help strengthen social structures and foster character development. Interactions with parents expressed through hand kissing and santri sambangan (visits) reflect respect, emotional connection, and community support. This symbolic interaction serves as character education for the students, instilling social ethics and cultural continuity. However, the focus of the study on one pesantren limits its generalizability. Future research should explore symbolic interactions in other pesantren to provide a broader perspective. The originality of this study lies in its focus on the role of symbols in shaping hierarchies and social identities in pesantren. By examining the pesantren educational environment, this study offers new insights into how symbols influence the dynamics of power, order, and communal values.*

Penelitian ini mengkaji makna simbolik dalam interaksi sosial santri dengan ustadz, guru, sesama santri, dan orang tua di Pondok Pesantren Muhammadiyah Boarding School Al-Manar Sumatera Selatan. Menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif berbasis studi kasus, penelitian ini menggunakan observasi, wawancara, dan dokumentasi sebagai teknik mengumpulkan data. Teknik analisis mencakup pengodean dan pengkategorian data yang dikumpulkan untuk mengidentifikasi pola dan tema terkait. Temuan penelitian ini mengungkapkan bahwa interaksi santri dengan ustadz dan guru dilambangkan dengan membungkuk dan mencium

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tangan, yang mencerminkan rasa hormat, ketaatan beragama, dan hierarki sosial. Tradisi-tradisi ini memperkuat ikatan budaya dan spiritual antara santri dan gurunya. Di antara sesama santri, saling memanggil dengan sebutan *akhi* (saudara laki-laki) dan *ukhti* (saudara perempuan) melambangkan rasa hormat, persatuan, dan pengembangan kepemimpinan. Interaksi ini membantu memperkuat struktur sosial dan menumbuhkan pengembangan karakter. Interaksi dengan orang tua, yang diungkapkan melalui ciuman tangan dan *sambangan* santri (kunjungan), mencerminkan rasa hormat, hubungan emosional, dan dukungan masyarakat. Interaksi simbolik ini berfungsi sebagai pendidikan karakter bagi para santri, yang menanamkan etika sosial dan kesinambungan budaya. Namun, fokus penelitian pada satu pesantren membatasi generalisasinya. Penelitian di masa mendatang harus mengeksplorasi interaksi simbolik di pesantren lainnya untuk memberikan perspektif yang lebih luas. Orisinalitas penelitian ini terletak pada fokusnya peran simbol dalam membentuk hierarki dan identitas sosial dalam pesantren. Dengan mengkaji lingkungan pendidikan pesantren, penelitian ini menawarkan wawasan baru tentang bagaimana simbol memengaruhi dinamika kekuasaan, tatanan, dan nilai-nilai komunal.

Keywords: *Symbolic Interaction, Social Interaction, Pesantren Tradition.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

Social interaction is fundamental to human life, including within *pesantren* environments. As a traditional Islamic educational institution, Pesantren is a crucial centre for community development, functioning as a subculture and social laboratory (Rohman, 2017; Yumnah, 2021). In these settings, *santri* (students in *pesantren*) interact and build social relationships based on Islamic values (Nashir & Jinan, 2018). Symbols such as language, gestures, and attributes significantly shape these interactions and the community's shared identity (Menggo et al., 2021).

Symbols in social interactions have specific meanings that are locally defined and context-dependent (Bolis & Schilbach, 2020; Moran, 2024). According to Tektigul et al. (2023), symbols can take various forms, including language, gestures, sounds, colours, and shapes. These symbols are imbued with meanings that are collectively agreed upon by their users (Newell, 2018; Rae, 2022). Hence, interpreting symbols requires understanding the social context and collective agreements within the *pesantren* community.

The *pesantren* tradition is rooted in various Islamic values and norms diligently maintained within the community (Basyar et al., 2020). This tradition is not merely a symbolic expression of Islamic principles but also a key element in reinforcing the unique identity of *pesantren* compared to other educational institutions in Indonesia, which often focus more broadly on Islamic education (Maimun et al., 2020). According to Katapidi (2021), traditions are deemed valuable if they offer tangible benefits to the community. Thus, preserving these traditions in *pesantren* affects the social behaviour of *santri*, influencing their interactions and reinforcing their identity (Nurhidin, 2023).

In particular, the Pesantren Al-Manar presents a unique environment where Islamic norms and values are preserved and passed down through generations. However, the symbolic meanings embedded in social interactions within *pesantren* still need to be studied. While previous research has explored various aspects of social life in *pesantren*, the lack of a focused analysis on the role of symbols in shaping social cohesion and religious identity represents an empirical gap. This issue becomes even more significant given that understanding these symbolic meanings can offer deeper insights into how religious values, culture, and traditions are perpetuated within the *pesantren* context.

According to symbolic interactionism theory, social interaction is shaped by the symbolic meanings individuals ascribe to objects, actions, and behaviours within their social environment (Burkitt, 2021; Carter & Fuller, 2016; Hutchins, 2020; Sumerau, 2020). In the context of Al-Manar, these symbols include language and gestures in social *santri* interaction and carry significant cultural and religious meanings. The symbolic interactionism theory, articulated by Blumer as cited by (Orsini, 2024; Stryker, 2017), helps explain how individuals in *pesantren* communities assign meaning to these symbols through their social interactions.

Previous studies, such as those conducted by Abidin & Sirojuddin (2024) discuss the role of *pesantren* in shaping character and discipline, Yusuf & Taufiq (2020) focus on the importance of Islamic education in forming social norms, Albar et al. (2024) explore how *pesantren* function as cultural transmission centres, Barsalou, (2019); Fay et al., (2018) delve into the symbolic meanings of gestures and attire in social settings, the role of *pesantren* in character development and social discipline has been explored. However, these studies should have extensively examined how symbols such as language, gestures, and attire contribute to maintaining social hierarchies and religious identities.

This gap is critical, as symbols are deeply embedded in everyday life and influence social structures in *pesantren*. Hence, symbolic interactionism allows us to understand the complexity of social roles and how they are maintained through interactions in a *pesantren* setting. While these studies provide valuable insights into the broader functioning of *pesantren*, they need an in-depth examination of the symbolic aspects of social interaction specific to *pesantren*. This study addresses this gap by focusing on symbolic meanings and their role in reinforcing social cohesion and hierarchy.

Based on the comparison of the background, theory, and previous research, the following questions emerge: How do specific symbols of social interaction among *santri* in the Al-Manar function to reinforce social hierarchies and define roles within the *pesantren* community? What symbolic meanings are attached to the everyday interactions among *santri*, and how do these symbols contribute to preserving religious and social identities within the *pesantren*? The objectives of this research are to examine the role of symbolic interactions in shaping social hierarchies within the Al-Manar, to explore the symbolic meanings associated with language and gestures in the daily interactions of *santri*, and to provide new insights into how these symbols are used to uphold communal norms and reinforce religious identity within the *pesantren*.

The findings from this study are expected to contribute to a deeper understanding of the symbolic dimensions of social interactions in *pesantren*. By uncovering how symbols like clothing and gestures function within social hierarchies and identity formation, this research provides a nuanced perspective on how *pesantren* traditions influence the behaviour and social cohesion of *santri*. This study will also serve as a foundation for

future research on symbolic interactions in other religious or educational contexts, expanding our understanding of the relationship between symbols, culture, and social structure.

II. METHOD

This research employs a qualitative method with a case study approach, allowing for an in-depth exploration of the lived experiences and social dynamics at the research site (Ilhami et al., 2024; Yin, 2018). The study was conducted at Pondok Pesantren Muhammadiyah Boarding School Al-Manar South Sumatra, selected due to its notable development as a Muhammadiyah's *pesantren* in a predominantly Nahdlatul Ulama environment. Al-Manar presents a unique tradition of social interaction among its residents, making it an ideal setting for this research.

The study was carried out over twelve months, from October 2022 to September 2023, with data collected through field observations, in-depth interviews, and documentation to explore the subjective dimension in depth (Ayoub et al., 2014; Tunc, 2019). Field observations focused on daily activities within the *pesantren*, such as formal rituals, informal social interactions, and symbols like clothing and gestures. Specific events, such as classroom interactions, prayer sessions, and communal gatherings, were closely observed to capture the nuances of social hierarchy and symbolic practices.

In-depth interviews were conducted with key participants, including *ustadz*, teachers, and active *santri*. These participants were selected based on their knowledge, experience, and involvement in the *pesantren's* social and educational systems. The interviews aimed to uncover insights into how symbols and social interactions influence community dynamics and the transmission of religious values. The interviewees provided perspectives on their roles, the *pesantren's* traditions, and the symbolic meanings embedded in daily practices.

Additionally, documents such as student handbooks, internal guidelines, and religious texts used within the *pesantren* were analyzed as secondary data sources (Turner et al., 2017). These documents provided context to the *pesantren's* structure and helped to understand the formalization of symbolic practices and hierarchical relationships. Data were analyzed through organization, interpretation, and narrative presentation. This analysis included coding and categorizing the collected data to identify patterns and themes related to symbols.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Based on the data that has been collected, the results show that the social interactions of *santris* that take place at the Al-Manar can be divided into two meanings, namely: 1) interaction between *santris* and teachers; 2) interaction between *santris* and fellow *santris*; and 3) interaction between *santris* and parents.

The Symbolic Meanings of *Santris'* Social Interactions with *Ustadz* and Teachers

In the *pesantren* tradition, the term teacher is commonly referred to as *ustadz*, while the *pesantren* leader is frequently called Kyai. In that regard, like Muhammadiyah Islamic Boarding Schools in general, especially in Al-Manar, as stated by (Azhari, 2023), there is no kiai call pinned to a figure in the *pesantren* environment, the general call that

applies is *ustadz*. Specifically, according to Mushlih (2023); Syauqi (2023), the term *ustadz* in the tradition of Al-Manar is used as a nickname for teachers of religious sciences. As for teachers of general sciences, *santri* uses the term teacher as a daily greeting in the *pesantren*.

For the *santri* themselves, *ustadz* and teachers are substitutes for parents in *pesantren* to protect, educate, and assist their growth and development to become adult human beings. According to (Efendi, 2023), the role of *ustadz* and teachers in educational activities towards *santris* is vast in shaping the character of *santris* into good Muslim personalities. In addition, it can also be said that *ustadz* and teachers also play an essential role in developing social, emotional, and personal integrity and helping *centres* master the knowledge and skills in the subjects they study and the education they follow in *pesantren*. Because of this relationship and role, *santri* has exceptional ethics when interacting with *ustadz* and teachers. In this case, at least several *santri* traditions in the Al-Manar are related to ethics in the interaction relationship between *santri* and *ustadz* and teachers: 1) the tradition of bowing and 2) kissing hands.

The Tradition of Bowing

The tradition of bowing is common among *santri* in the *pesantren* environment, reflecting deep respect towards *Kyai*, *ustadz*, and teachers. In the *pesantren* tradition, bowing the head is done by bending the upper body slightly forward, without exaggeration, so it still looks natural and does not disturb comfort. As observed on September 9, 2022, *santri* typically lower their gaze when bowing their heads as a form of *adab* (proper etiquette), avoiding direct eye contact with the *ustadz* as a sign of respect. This gesture is usually accompanied by greetings such as “Assalamu'alaikum Ustadz” or other respectful calls.

For the *centres* of Al-Manar, *ustadz* and teachers are individuals who should be accorded proper respect due to their roles as educators. As stated by Aufa (2023), it is a must for *santri* to give appropriate respect to *ustadz* and teachers because of their older age and mainly because of their services in educating *santri*. To the *ustadz*, if they meet on the street, the *santri* will greet by calling *ustadz* or *ummi* (for those who are married) and *ustadzah* (for those who are not married) while bowing down slightly. For general subject teachers, the respect is similar in terms of bowing, though without the added gesture of kissing hands.

This practice underscores the ethical and cultural values inherent in the interaction between *santri* and their educators, emphasizing respect based not only on age but also on the educators’ contributions, as documented data, is part of the ethics of *santri* which is regulated in the *santri* discipline. Additionally, the use of specific greetings like *ummi* for married females and *ustadzah* for those who are unmarried reflects the social nuances within the *pesantren* culture. These distinctions suggest a strong link between social status and the forms of interaction between *santri* and their educators.

Culturally, bowing in front of educators in *pesantren* has deep roots within Indonesian traditions. According to (Azhari, 2023), this practice parallels broader societal norms, where bowing has been a sign of respect for centuries. Historical records from the Majapahit era, as noted in the manuscript of *Kitab Silakrama* (Irawan, 2018), highlight that *santri* were expected to bow when approaching their teachers, a practice that extended to the nobility and elite of the time. This demonstrates the historical continuity of bowing as a deeply embedded social ethic in Indonesian culture.

The tradition of bowing in *pesantren* is not merely ceremonial; it serves a critical function in reinforcing hierarchical structures and instilling values of respect and humility among *santri*. This gesture creates a solemn and respectful atmosphere, shaping the behaviour of *santri* and ensuring that religious and cultural traditions are preserved. However, its role extends beyond a simple act of respect. It influences the entire educational and social fabric of the *pesantren*. Through this practice, both the internal dynamics of the *pesantren* and broader Indonesian cultural values are reinforced.

Bowing acts as a symbolic representation of the hierarchical relationship between *santri* and authority figures such as *ustadz* and teachers. The physical act of lowering oneself mirrors the spiritual and educational deference required within the *pesantren* system. This hierarchy is deeply rooted in Islamic tradition, where respect for knowledge and those who impart it is paramount (Azra, 2015; Firmansyah et al., 2024). In this way, the hierarchy ensures the proper functioning of the *pesantren* as an educational institution and the maintenance of discipline and order (Yasin & Khasbulloh, 2022). This was observed at Al-Manar on October 7, 2022, where the daily practice of bowing reinforces the hierarchical structure of authority, fostering an environment in which the transmission of knowledge is deeply embedded within a moral framework of respect and humility.

The tradition of kissing hands

Kissing the hands of *ustadz* and teachers is a deeply embedded tradition in the *pesantren* culture, particularly among the *santris* of Al-Manar. This gesture symbolizes profound respect and reverence, specifically directed toward those recognized for their high status, knowledge, and piety. According to Aufa (2023); Azhari (2023), the tradition of kissing the hands of *ustadz* and parents is a form of respect for people who are glorified because of their status (parents, kiai, *ustadz*, and so on), knowledge, and purity in worship. While rooted in Islamic teachings, this custom is also heavily intertwined with cultural values and practices, making it a multifaceted act that transcends mere ritualistic behavior.

The tradition of hand-kissing is not just a cultural formality. Still, it is deeply anchored in Islamic teachings, supported by references from the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad Saw. For instance, the hadith of Fatimah R.A. kissing the hands of the Prophet Muhammad Saw underscores the legitimacy and reverence associated with this practice (Thani et al., 2021). This act reflects the values of humility and respect towards those who embody spiritual and educational authority, reinforcing the connection between religious teachings and daily conduct in *pesantren*.

By observing this tradition, *santri*'s internalize key Islamic principles such as *ta'zim* (honoring those of knowledge and piety) and *tawadlu'* (humility), aligning their physical actions with broader religious values. This connection between gesture and faith constantly reminds the *santri* of their place within the spiritual hierarchy, reaffirming the *ustadz* as educators and moral and spiritual exemplars.

Hand-kissing is not random or casual but is performed with specific etiquette and profound awareness of its implications. The *santri* kisses the outer palm or the back of the hand, sometimes both, maintaining a respectful posture that does not exceed the level of bowing in prayer. This distinction is crucial as it ensures the gesture remains one of respect and not worship, reinforcing the concept that reverence towards educators

does not equate to worship, which is reserved for Allah Swt alone (Yusuph & Oniye, 2022).

The practice also reflects broader Indonesian cultural norms where respect for elders and teachers is deeply ingrained. The nuanced execution of the gesture, where even the positioning of the *santri's* body is regulated, demonstrates the *pesantren's* commitment to upholding traditional decorum and respect, which are seen as essential components of a *santri's* education and moral upbringing.

Sociologically, the tradition of kissing hands is a solemn and almost sacred form of interaction between *santri* and their respected elders, such as *ustadz* and *Kyai*. This interaction embodies social ethics through physical gestures, making the act a visual and tangible expression of the values held within the *pesantren*. The tradition is not just about showing respect; it is a way for *santri's* to connect with their *ustadz* on a deeper level, often seen as a means to seek blessings or *barokah* from those they revere (Fijriah & Ellisa, 2022). This belief emphasizes the spiritual significance of the *ustadz* beyond their roles as mere educators; they are seen as conduits of divine wisdom and *barokah*, bridging the gap between knowledge and spirituality.

This tradition plays a critical role in reinforcing the hierarchical nature of *pesantren*, where respect for educators is paramount. It establishes a clear line of authority and reverence that guides the behavior of *santri* both within and outside the educational setting. The practice also reinforces the belief that those who possess knowledge and piety hold a special status, thus encouraging *santri* to value and pursue learning as a pathway to spiritual elevation (Nugroho et al., 2021).

Therefore, the practice of kissing hands carries significant theological, cultural, and social implications. It is crucial in maintaining the hierarchical structure of respect within the *pesantren*, ensuring that the values of humility, reverence, and discipline are constantly upheld. The gesture aligns closely with religious teachings, providing a daily expression of the ethics central to *pesantren* education. Furthermore, it helps to cultivate a sacred and solemn atmosphere, one that distinguishes the *pesantren* as a place of not only academic learning but also moral and spiritual development.

Symbolic Meaning of Social Interaction Between Santris

The *santri* in *pesantren* are members of the community who have different individual backgrounds in tribal, social, economic, cultural, and so on. The differences in the backgrounds of *santri* in *pesantren* are melted in a particular interaction frame that obliterates the boundaries of each *santri's* differences. Thus, each *santri* feels that they are equal to other *santri*. To establish a good social environment, there are several traditions in interaction with fellow *santris* at the Al-Manar, namely *akhi* (brother) and *ukhti* (sister) calls to senior *santri*.

Regarding the tradition of calling *akhi* and *ukhti* to senior *santri*, according to Aufa (2023), calling *akhi* and *ukhti* is a familiar greeting from junior *santris* to senior *santris* as a form of respect for them. The term senior *santri* at the Al-Manar does not mean the person who first became a *santri* but instead the education level. That is, if there are new *santris* who enter the Al-Manar as transfer *santris* of class XII, then automatically the call *akhi* will also be pinned on him by all *santris* below his class level.

The use of the nickname *akhi* is not limited to the older *santri* in the *pesantren* but also applies to new *santri* with a higher level of education, such as class XII transfer *santri*, indicating that the respect system is more oriented towards the educational structure

rather than the age hierarchy or the length of time in the *pesantren*. This confirms the importance of the hierarchical structure based on education level, where *santri* in higher grades, regardless of whether they are new or old, still receive respectful calls from *santri* in lower grades, creating a clear and consistent respect system among *santri*.

This tradition has essential meanings for *santri* and *ustadz*, namely theological, political, and sociological. Philosophically, according to Azhari (2023), the call *akhi* and *ukhti* as a greeting to senior *santri* not only functions as a call to *santri* based on their gender but also shows a religious impression. In this case there is a consensus, which although not explicitly stated, is agreed that *akhi* and *ukhti* refer to people who look religious. *Santri* not only display religious clothing but must embody the religious impression in their daily interactions.

Politically, according to Azhari (2023), the greetings *akhi* and *ukhti* for senior *santri* are intended to make junior *santri* give respect to senior *santri*. This is important for the social structure of *santri*, which in turn can help make it easier for senior *santri* as IPM (*Ikatan Pelajar Muhammadiyah*) administrators to control the behavior of junior *santri* through the authority given to senior *santri* in the IPM management. However, it is important to note that the authority referred to here is within certain limits and is intended to train the leadership spirit of senior *santri*.

Based on the description above, it can be understood that politically, the greetings *akhi* and *ukhti* function as an important tool in strengthening the social structure in *pesantren*, where junior *santri* show respect to senior *santri*, not just as a formality, but also as a means of maintaining order and hierarchy in the *pesantren* environment. The use of this greeting is closely related to the role of senior *santri* in IPM, where they have the authority to regulate and control the behavior of junior *santri*, so that respect through this greeting strengthens their authority in carrying out management tasks. However, the authority given to senior *santri* is regulated within certain limits, serves as a means of fostering leadership, and is designed to foster responsible leadership and not be abused (Ramadhansyah & Wijaya, 2023). By providing limited authority, *pesantren* not only maintain the social structure but also foster the character and leadership of senior *santri*, which is an important aspect of education, where they learn to manage their responsibilities and respect the limits of leadership (Prasetyo et al., 2023).

As for sociologically, according to Azzahra (2023), the greetings *akhi* and *ukhti* as a greeting to senior *santri* is intended to create a strong sense of brotherhood, where senior *santri* appear as older siblings, as ideal *santri* role models for junior *santri* and at the same time become protectors of junior *santri*. As for Fuadi (2023), as a senior *santri*, he should get reasonable respect from junior *santris* with the greetings *akhi* and *ukhti*. This is understandable considering that in the social structure, an older person is expected to be a role model for younger people, so that the older person should be respected.

Based on the description above, it can be concluded that the tradition of using *akhi* and *ukhti* among *santri* in *pesantren* has significant social impacts and implications that touch on various dimensions of communal life within these educational institutions, namely: 1) promotion of equality and unity; 2) educational hierarchy and respect; 3) reinforcement of social structure; and 4) development of leadership and character. Overall, the tradition of calling *akhi* and *ukhti* has profound implications for the social fabric of *pesantren* (Firmansyah et al., 2024). It promotes equality and unity, reinforces educational hierarchies, supports the social structure, fosters leadership and character

development, and underscores religious and communal values. Through these practices, *pesantren* create an environment where respect and responsibility are deeply embedded in the everyday interactions between *santris*, shaping a cohesive and supportive educational community.

The Symbolic Meanings of Santri's Social Interactions with Parents

Parents and family are individuals who have a glorified position in Islam. For a *santri*, glorifying parents by being filial, respecting them, and praying for them is an order of Allah Swt contained in Islamic law. In this case, there are several routine activities that have become a tradition for *santri* at the Al-Manar related to interactions with parents and family, namely: 1) kissing hands; and 2) *sambangan santri* (visits).

The Tradition of Kissing Parents' Hands

Parents are mothers and fathers who have given birth, raised, educated, and cared for a child from childhood to adulthood. The position of parents for a Muslim is so glorified and exalted. Filial piety to both parents in Islamic law is a means to the pleasure of Allah Swt which can lead to heaven. Conversely, the wrath of both parents is the cause of the wrath of Allah Swt which can lead a servant to hell.

In connection with that, according to Takril (2023), *santri* of Al-Manar are required to be dutiful, obey, and respect parents as part of carrying out the commands of Allah Swt. One form of respect for parents is done by *santris* by kissing their parents' hands when they meet, especially when they visit the *pesantren*. The *santri's* feeling of respect when kissing their parents' hands is different from the *santri's* feeling of respect when kissing the *ustadz's* hand. When kissing the *ustadz's* hand, the feelings that arise in the heart are respect and reluctance to them. While to parents, the feelings that arise are respect and affection. In such circumstances, there is usually also a sense of hope and prayer to Allah Swt for the good of the parents.

In the context of Al-Manar, the act of kissing one's parents' hands is a blend of Islamic teachings and traditional Indonesian customs. From an Islamic perspective, the respect for parents is emphasized in several Quranic verses, such as in Surah Al-Isra (17:23), where Muslims are commanded to honor their parents. This is not merely a social expectation but a religious duty, known as *birr al-walidain*, or filial piety, which is central to Islamic family ethics (Hammad et al., 2024). In Indonesia, this religious principle is reinforced by cultural traditions, where kissing the hands of elders is seen as a mark of respect, reverence, and humility. As Zaenuri & Yusuf (2021) notes, this practice exemplifies the intertwining of *adat* (customary practices) and Islamic values in family interactions, especially within the *pesantren* setting.

Beyond the physical act, the gesture of kissing parents' hands carries significant spiritual meaning. In many Islamic traditions, acts of respect toward parents are seen not only as societal obligations but as acts of worship. As *santri* kiss their parents' hands, this action is often accompanied by prayers and hopes for the well-being of the parents, thus infusing the physical gesture with spiritual depth. This act symbolizes a triangular relationship between the *santri*, their parents, and God, where the respect shown to parents is viewed as an extension of one's devotion to God (Firmansyah, 2024).

This spiritual dimension adds a layer of meaning that transcends the physical action, as it becomes a way for *santri* to fulfil their religious duties while simultaneously seeking divine blessings. However, a critical question arises regarding the long-term impact of such ritualistic practices on the *santri's* spiritual development. While these acts

strengthen familial and spiritual bonds, there is a concern that the repetitive nature of such rituals may lead to a form of spiritual complacency. As Bellous (2021) argues, religious traditions, when not accompanied by deep personal reflection, can risk becoming mechanical, losing their transformative spiritual potential. Therefore, while the act of kissing hands serves as a powerful symbol of respect and devotion, its spiritual significance must be continually reinforced through education and reflective practice to ensure it remains meaningful.

Based on this description, the tradition of kissing parents' hands daily reinforces core Islamic values such as respect, humility, and gratitude. By consistently performing this act, *santri* internalize these values, which become embedded in their character and behavior. According to Widiyono (2022), rituals like hand-kissing are integral to the moral education provided within *pesantren*, as they offer practical expressions of the abstract ethical teachings found in Islamic texts.

The Tradition of Sambangan Santri

Sambangan santri is a tradition of parents visiting the *pesantren* to visit their *santris* children. Every *santri* eagerly awaits the arrival of parents in *sambangan santri* to visit their children at the *pesantren*. The tradition of visiting *santris* at the Al-Manar is usually carried out on Fridays, especially in the first week of the beginning of each month.

In that regard, according to Aufa (2023), the determination of the visit time, which is Friday, is because on Friday the learning activities in the *pesantren* are closed, so that parents and *santris* have enough time and freedom to meet and stay in touch. Ahead of the visit, usually one week or a few days before the visit, the *santri* will be facilitated by the *pesantren*, through *ustadz*, to contact the parents of the *santri* to convey the things or needs that are needed and that need to be brought during the visit later. Regarding the place determined by the *pesantren* manager to receive parents who make a visit, it is the *pesantren* gazebo, the classrooms that have been provided, and the courtyard of the mosque terrace. The *santris* are also permitted by the *pesantren* manager to be taken outside the *pesantren* to buy something that is not available, such as clothes, pants, and so on. The time limit for leaving the *pesantren* is limited to 17:00 pm.

In this tradition, there is a meeting with parents and innate for *santris* to be a symbol. According to *ustadz* and *santri* at the Al-Manar, the symbol contains cultural, psychological, and sociological meanings. According to Azhari (2023), *sambangan santri* is a cultural tradition in the *pesantren* environment in which there are activities of visiting parents to visit their children who are in *pesantren*. The visit is a recreational meeting for *santri* and parents to release their longing and tell each other stories after not meeting for a long time. In the *pesantren* tradition, the first visit for new boarding *santris* is usually allowed after the *santris* have been *there* for at least 30-40 days, so it is commonly referred to as the 40-day visit. New boarding *santris* can only be contacted by their parents after the 40-day waiting period since their arrival at the *pesantren*.

Psychologically, *sambangan santri*, symbolized by a meeting between *santri* and their parents or family, symbolizes a situation of longing between the two. Interaction between *santri* and parents or significant others, such as the nuclear family, usually involves intensive emotional relationships in love, tenderness, attention, and a stable attitude (Hallett & Hawbaker, 2021; Noone, 2020). According to Syauqi (2023), *through these meetings*, *santri* and their parents will pour out all their longings so that the longing feelings that have long been harboured can be realized. In addition, the

tradition of *sambangan santri* is also a critical moment for parents, where the *ustadz* will usually tell the parents about the individual development of the *santri* in the form of academic skills, religion, and *santri* worship so that parents can find out how the struggles and situations faced by their children while in *pesantren*. To ensure their children's condition, parents usually always ask the *ustadz* to look after and guide their children while at the *pesantren*.

Furthermore, the sociological meaning of this tradition can be seen from the ethics of *santri* when their parents and families are visited, namely wearing neat clothes and kissing the hands of visiting parents or families. Neat clothes and kissing hands in this tradition, according to Ali Azhari (interviewed by Firmansyah on June 28, 2023), are related to *santri* manners as a form of *santri's* respect and affection for their parents and families who come to visit them.

In the *sambangan*, according to Syauqi (2023), this tradition symbolizes a sense of solidarity for other *santri*, because parents usually bring a variety of foods, especially home specialties favored by *santri* and various equipment needed by *santri*. The food brought is often in large enough quantities so that it can be distributed to other *santris* who are in the same room or dormitory with the *santris*. In addition to providing luggage for *santris*, during this *sambangan* moment, parents will usually also pay monthly routine contributions in the form of school fees and other costs related to the *santris'* educational activities, including providing pocket money to shop for the *santris'* daily needs for the next month before *sambangan* the following month.

Based on this description, it can be concluded that the tradition of *sambangan santri* in *pesantren* symbolizes solidarity between *santri* because the food brought by parents not only meets the needs of the visited *santri* but is also distributed to other *santri* in the room or dormitory, reflecting togetherness and sharing among them. In addition to food, parents also bring supplies and needs of the *santri*, showing their concern for the welfare and comfort of their children in the *pesantren*. The *sambangan* moment is also used to settle financial obligations, such as paying school fees and other costs, emphasizing parents' responsibility for their children's education. Parents also provide pocket money for *santri's* daily needs for a month, supporting them in managing their finances and teaching the value of independence.

The tradition of kissing parents' hands has a profound social impact within the *santri* community. It deeply ingrains moral and religious values, symbolizing respect and obedience, reflecting the Islamic emphasis on filial piety (Andaya, 2018). This practice underscores the importance of parental respect in Islamic teachings and enhances the spiritual bond between *santri* and their parents. Additionally, kissing hands fosters a solid emotional connection, distinguishing this form of respect from others, such as shown to *ustadz*. It cultivates a sense of gratitude and affection, accompanied by prayers for the parents' well-being, which adds a spiritual dimension to the gesture and enriches familial relationships. The implications of this tradition are significant; it serves as a daily reinforcement of religious teachings, aligning *santri* behaviour with Islamic values of respect and gratitude. Moreover, the tradition blends Islamic principles with Indonesian cultural norms, creating a unique expression of respect that preserves and promotes traditional values within a contemporary context.

In the tradition of *sambangan*, *santri* has a significant social impact by reinforcing cultural connections, supporting psychological well-being, and fostering community spirit. It serves as an artistic tradition that strengthens the bond between *santri* and their

families through scheduled visits, which help alleviate the emotional stress of separation and build a sense of community and support. Psychologically, these reunions address the emotional needs of *santri*, easing homesickness and reinforcing emotional connections, thereby enhancing their overall well-being. The tradition also promotes community building by encouraging parents to share food and supplies, which fosters solidarity and mutual aid among *santri*. Furthermore, *sambangan santri* is crucial in managing educational finances and supporting daily needs, highlighting parents' ongoing involvement in their children's education and personal development. It also influences social dynamics by encouraging *santri* to uphold respectful presentation and behaviour, reinforcing the *pesantren's* values of discipline and cultural respect.

An overview of the above discussion is presented in the following diagram.

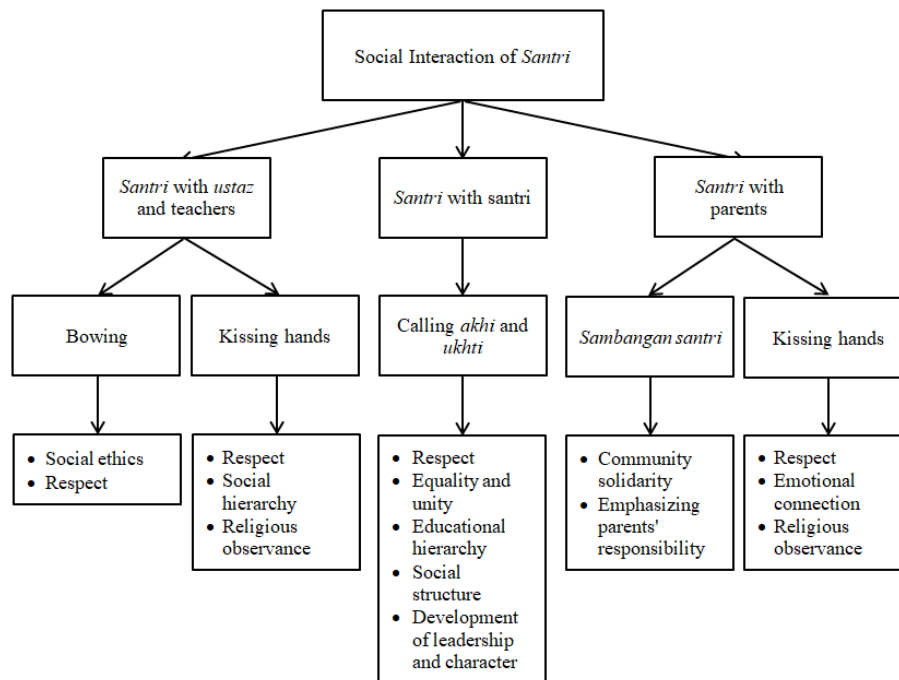


Figure 1. The symbolic meanings of santris' social interactions in Al-Manar

IV. CONCLUSION

The study of symbolic meanings in the social interactions of *sentries* with *ustadz*, teachers, and peers at Al-Manar reveals the significant role of traditional practices in fostering respect and strengthening social and spiritual bonds. For example, the practices of bowing and hand-kissing signify deep respect and acknowledgement of authority, reinforcing the educational hierarchy. The use of terms like *akhi* (brother) and *ukhti* (sister) reflects a sense of unity and equality among peers, while the tradition of *sambangan santri* helps maintain emotional connections with parents, easing the burden of separation. These traditions embody cultural and Islamic values and serve as essential tools in the moral and social development of *santris*. They cultivate mutual respect, reinforce communal bonds, and preserve the *pesantren's* unique educational structure. The findings suggest preserving these traditions is key to sustaining the *pesantren's* cultural and academic identity. Future research could focus on the long-term personal development of *santris*, explicitly examining how these symbolic interactions influence their leadership skills, social integration, and adherence to religious values. A

comparative study across different *pesantren* could also reveal variations in traditional practices and their impacts on student development.

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