

Santri Punk: Identity Hybridization within the Pesantren Community

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Abstract

Pesantren, as religious educational institutions, play a crucial role in shaping Muslim intellectuals. However, the emergence of the “santri punk” phenomenon within pesantren indicates a new dynamic that challenges the traditional religious image of these institutions. This study aims to explore the motives behind the construction of the santri punk identity at Pantura Lamongan pesantren and to analyze the influence of identity status in this process. Using a qualitative approach, data were collected through individual life history methods and interviews, then examined through Alfred Schutz’s phenomenological theory and James Marcia’s identity status concept. The findings reveal that the formation of santri punk is influenced by “because motives,” such as shock culture, difficulties in social interaction, and cultural encounters, as well as “in order to motives,” including the pursuit of solidarity, social identity, and self-actualization. This process is reinforced by identity crises experienced by santri aged 16–18 years, with a tendency toward identity achievement and identity moratorium statuses. External factors such as globalization, advancements in information technology, and the cultural characteristics of the Pantura region further accelerate the access to and adoption of punk culture within pesantren environments. These findings demonstrate that the santri punk identity represents a form of cultural hybridity within the context of pesantren’s social transformation.

Keywords: *Santri Punk; Pesantren; Hybrid Identity*



Introduction

The phenomenon of punk youth in Indonesia, particularly in urban and suburban areas, represents a localized manifestation of a movement that initially emerged in London as a form of resistance against social inequality and state domination. Punk embodies the spirit of individual freedom and resistance against repressive systems, with its iconic slogan *do it yourself*, emphasizing self-reliance and individual autonomy (Annisa et al., 2016; Bestari, 2016). In the Indonesian context, however, this spirit has undergone a shift in meaning: punk is more commonly perceived as a street lifestyle characterized by striking appearances and activities in public spaces, such as busking or loitering. As a result, society tends to stigmatize this community, viewing them as symbols of moral decline or even as a form of social pathology (Musyarafah & Lukmawati, 2018).

Nevertheless, social reality is more complex. A unique phenomenon has emerged in which punk identity merges with pesantren life – Islamic boarding schools known for their conservatism and emphasis on religious and moral values (Dirdjosanjoto, 2013). The emergence of *santri punk* (punk students) within pesantren challenges the dichotomy between religiosity and cultural resistance. Although they carry typical punk attributes such as skull bracelets, bandanas, and distinctive hairstyles, *santri punk* continue to fulfill their religious obligations regularly, including reciting the Qur'an, participating in congregational prayers, and attending religious classes (Utomo, 2023).

This phenomenon illustrates a dialectical process between two cultures that are normatively considered opposing: religious devotion and punk culture. *Santri punk* navigate institutional restrictions adaptively, accepting disciplinary measures such as *ta'zir* (sanctions) while still maintaining their identity as students. Although they lack formal organizational structures, they share solidarity and a common vision regarding the importance of freedom of expression within the relatively strict environment of the pesantren.

From the perspective of the sociology of religion, the *santri punk* phenomenon is particularly intriguing as it presents a new form of hybridization between religious and cultural identities. This study seeks to uncover the motivations and social dynamics that enable the formation of *santri punk* identity, and how punk values and religious devotion interact and negotiate within the *pesantren* context. This phenomenon complements previous studies on Muslim punks, which have largely focused on aspects of religious conversion (*hijrah*) and symbolic identity transformation (Papineau, 2020; Rosidi et al., 2023; Sahlani et al., 2019), yet have not specifically examined the social construction process within *pesantren* – an institution that holds significant religious authority within Indonesia’s Muslim society.

Method

This study is a qualitative research employing a descriptive-analytical approach aimed at uncovering in depth the processes and motives behind the construction of *santri punk* identity within Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) located in the northern coastal region of Lamongan. The data sources consist of both primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained through direct interviews with three *santri punk* – fans of the band Superman is Dead (SID) – from two different *pesantren*. Secondary data were drawn from literature such as books, journals, and articles related to the punk movement, particularly the phenomenon of Muslim punks and *pesantren* culture.

The type of data used in this study is field data, which was collected directly from the research location. Data collection techniques include two main methods: *individual’s life history* and interviews. The *life history* method is employed to explore the life experiences of the subjects in a deep and contextual manner, requiring sustained interaction between the researcher and the subjects in order to build *rapport*. Meanwhile, interviews are conducted to delve into the subjects’ perspectives on their lives as *santri punk*. Data analysis is carried out in three stages: data reduction (filtering relevant data), data display (organizing and connecting data in visual forms such as tables or diagrams), and data verification (interpreting data through theoretical

frameworks). This study adopts a sociological approach to understand the interaction between individual santri and the social structure of the pesantren in the formation of *santri punk* identity.

Discussion

Santri Punk and the Northern Coast of Lamongan

The phenomenon of *santri punk* along the Northern Coast (Pantura) of Lamongan showcases a unique encounter between the punk subculture and the Islamic tradition of pesantren. Punk, known for its libertarian spirit and rejection of social standardization, has evolved into various forms, including *Muslim punk*—individuals who embrace religious devotion while maintaining their punk identity. From this variant emerged the figure of the *santri punk*: individuals who are formally students in pesantren but adopt a punk lifestyle (Nabila, 2021), often inspired by the band Superman Is Dead (SID) and its fan community, the Outsiders.

Santri punk typically wear signature punk accessories such as bracelets, Electrohell-branded t-shirts, boots, and bandanas, though only during relaxed moments due to the strict rules of the pesantren. They also enjoy singing SID songs like *Sunset di Tanah Anarki* and *We Are the Outsiders* during their free time. SID concerts offer them a space for free expression, although attending such events often involves sneaking out and risking punishments from the pesantren authorities, such as being forced to bathe in dirty drainage water.

Despite frequent friction due to activities like leaving the dormitory without permission, *santri punk* demonstrate positive contributions within the pesantren environment, such as promoting cleanliness and advocating for plastic waste reduction. This indicates their efforts to integrate punk values—such as environmental awareness—with Islamic teachings and pesantren life. They also maintain their santri identity within certain boundaries, such as continuing to perform prayers even during concerts and rejecting deviant behaviors like drinking alcohol and engaging in free sex.

Geographically, Pantura Lamongan is a bustling coastal area rich in economic and cultural activities, including a tough coastal culture characterized by illegal street racing and punk communities. However, this area also has deep Islamic roots, marked by numerous pesantren and religious sites. The encounter between pesantren culture and the suburban coastal subculture has given rise to the unique dynamic of the *santri punk*—a hybrid identity that seeks to reconcile two seemingly opposing worlds.

Experiences and Aspirations of Santri Punk

This section discusses the underlying motives behind the emergence of *santri punk* identity in the pesantren environment along the Northern Coast of Lamongan. These motives are analyzed into several main categories: cultural encounter, shock culture, social interaction, solidarity, social identity, and self-actualization. All these motives fall under the *because motive* category, meaning they arise from conditions previously experienced by the individuals.

Cultural Encounter

The pesantren serves as a space for social interaction, bringing together individuals from diverse social, cultural, and geographic backgrounds. It becomes a site for the exchange of information and values that facilitates the formation of new identities. This is illustrated in Dito's experience, who initially struggled with socializing. The pesantren environment provided an opportunity for him to meet a senior student who introduced him to the band Superman Is Dead (SID) and its fan community, the Outsiders.

"I got to know the Outsiders through my senior. Because I was selective in choosing friends, I had a hard time finding the right person. Then, at one point, I met this senior and started to befriend him..."

Although Dito had been aware of punk culture through his coastal neighborhood, his deeper engagement with the Outsiders community only occurred after entering the pesantren.

A similar experience was shared by Rianto, who became familiar with concert-going culture and music communities through the diverse student population in the pesantren. Rianto initially encountered Endang Soekamti and the Kamtis Family community, and through these networks, he later discovered SID and the Outsiders.

“I started going to concerts after I entered the pesantren. Initially, I joined the Kamtis Family and eventually got to know the Outsiders.”

Meanwhile, Bowo, who came from a religious family with little exposure to popular culture, also encountered the Outsiders community for the first time within the pesantren environment. For him, the pesantren became a space of realization regarding the importance of solidarity and camaraderie within a community.

“I learned about the Outsiders in pesantren; I used to be really naive... I only became aware of these kinds of things after joining the pesantren...”

From these three narratives, it can be concluded that the diversity of students' backgrounds creates a productive space for cultural exchange within the pesantren. The identity of the *santri punk* does not form instantly, but rather through an ongoing process of cultural interaction within the pesantren setting.

Shock Culture

The first experience of entering a pesantren also brought a cultural clash (*shock culture*) for the *santri punk*. Family background becomes the initial context that shapes an individual's religious orientation. For Dito, who came from a family with “moderate” religious practices, encountering the highly normative pesantren culture posed a particular challenge, especially regarding the obligation to wear typical santri attire such as sarongs and caps.

“I am just like this, meaning I am just plain as I am. In the pesantren, we are expected to dress like pious people...”

Rianto experienced a similar situation. He was the first in his family to enter a pesantren. Although his family supported religious education, their lack of prior

experience with pesantren culture meant Rianto had to go through a period of adjustment.

"No one in my family, neither my immediate nor extended family, had ever studied in a pesantren before... I was the first to start."

Unlike Dito and Rianto, Bowo came from a family more closely tied to religious values and had indirect exposure to pesantren life through his older brother. However, he too had to adjust to the new culture within the pesantren.

"No, neither of my parents are pesantren alumni... it was my brother who once studied at a pesantren, though he didn't finish."

Thus, shock culture became a catalyst for identity dynamics among santri, which eventually opened space for the formation of alternative identities, such as *santri punk*.

Social Interaction

The final motive that contributed to the formation of *santri punk* identity was the experience of social interaction. Dito provides the clearest example. He admitted that he had limited social life because he often helped his parents and rarely hung out, which made it difficult for him to find friends he truly connected with.

"I am not someone who socializes a lot... I found it quite difficult to make friends because I didn't have much time to hang out..."

This limitation created a need for Dito to find a new, more accepting social environment, which he eventually found within the Outsider community, known for being more inclusive and warm.

Solidarity

Social solidarity emerged as one of the main motives driving santri to join the Outsider community – the fan base of the band Superman is Dead (SID). Dito, one of the informants, described how he struggled to socialize in everyday life, including in

the pesantren, where people were often stereotyped as either “good” or “naughty.” In contrast, within the Outsider community, he found a more inclusive and open environment.

"When I got to know the Outsiders, I felt a connection because of the solidarity and openness they showed. You could easily find solidarity when you wore attributes like their t-shirts, flags, and other accessories—they would instantly treat you like a friend, even without knowing you. It felt like being part of a family..."

Similar experiences were shared by Rianto and Bowo. Rianto found that through SID's lyrics, which voiced the concerns of marginalized groups, he was drawn to the Outsiders and deeply felt their strong solidarity. This motivated him to bring the Outsider culture into the pesantren as a way to foster a more comfortable and egalitarian atmosphere among friends.

"The first time I experienced the concert world was through Kamtis... they had a strong sense of friendship. That inspired me to become part of them and feel that solid camaraderie."

Meanwhile, Bowo admitted that the sense of solidarity in the pesantren was not as strong as what he experienced within the Outsiders, prompting him to create a similar community at the pesantren.

"Of course, there are some good and close friends at the pesantren, but it's not as solid as what I found in Outsiders, definitely."

Overall, *santri punk* viewed the Outsider culture as a social space that supported solidarity without barriers—quite different from pesantren environments, which tended to establish social boundaries based on religious performance or personal background.

Social Identity

Another important motive was the search for and formation of social identity. Dito expressed that his involvement with the Outsiders made him more responsible, independent, and attentive to his appearance. The Outsider style – neatly combed hair and tidy clothing – reflected a responsible identity, distinct from the typically messy punk aesthetic.

"I don't know whether you'd call it identity or something else. But the Outsiders shaped me into what I am today, emphasizing independence and responsibility as parts of my character..."

Rianto also developed his social identity through specific attributes such as Rambel t-shirts, bandanas, and Outsider bracelets. He associated these with being "cool" and youth rebellion, while also feeling that he was simply being himself.

"At first, it was because I thought being young meant being cool... But eventually, I just felt like I was being myself."

For Bowo, the Outsider identity was more about critical thinking and anti-establishment attitudes. He resonated with SID's rebellious lyrics, which he saw as representing the spirit of youth who refuse to be passive.

"Yeah, I guess that's right. I felt more represented and had an identity that matched my true self. That's how I think young people should be."

This identity formation process was reflective and dialectical, combining religious values from the pesantren with the critical and inclusive spirit of the Outsiders.

Self-Actualization

The final motive was self-actualization, where *santri punk* found spaces to grow and become the best version of themselves. Dito, for instance, merged values like responsibility, independence, and environmental concern from the Outsider culture with Islamic teachings he learned at the pesantren.

"I also keep learning and shaping myself into the best version of me through the lessons I get from the song lyrics..."

Dito even initiated a cleanliness movement at the pesantren as a concrete application of the values he absorbed. He also maintained his religious obligations, such as performing prayers, even when attending concerts.

Rianto felt that self-actualization happened through the openness and freedom of expression he found within the Outsider community. He felt he was no longer boxed in or afraid of negative labeling.

"Moreover, I found a place where I could be myself without fear of being labeled negatively..."

Meanwhile, for Bowo, joining the Outsiders broadened his worldview and gave him room to explore his identity as a religious youth who could still be open to music and social networks beyond the pesantren.

"There, I learned a lot about openness. I can still be myself, coming from a religious background..."

The explanation above shows that the Outsider culture provided an alternative space that fostered solidarity, social identity, and self-actualization for the *santri punk*. Rather than abandoning their religious identity, these santri constructed a new, more fluid and open form of religiosity and cultural expression – embodied in the figure of the "santri punk."

Santri Punk as a New Cultural Phenomenon

Identity crisis is a common dynamic experienced by adolescents, as it is a period during which individuals are in the process of forming and selecting their personal identities. In the context of pesantren (Islamic boarding schools) in the Pantura (North Coast) region of Lamongan, this phenomenon of identity crisis finds a unique expression through the emergence of *santri punk*—students who merge pesantren culture with the punk subculture (Papineau, 2020). This phenomenon not only

demonstrates the diversity of identity expressions but also challenges the cultural boundaries that have traditionally been established within the pesantren world.

In general, pesantren are known as traditional Islamic educational institutions with a strong culture that tends to resist external influences (Dhofier, 2011). However, the dynamics of globalization and advances in information technology have enabled cross-cultural exchanges, including the introduction of punk subculture into the pesantren environment. The pesantren's location in Pantura – a region known for its *abangan* (syncretic) culture and openness to cultural pluralism – has further facilitated encounters between santri and the outside world (Muqoyyidin, 2012), including exposure to music scenes and alternative subcultures such as punk.

The *santri punk* identity emerges through a dialectical process between traditional pesantren culture and the outsider subculture, particularly the punk lifestyle. This process reflects not only an identity crisis but also a search for selfhood among santri who feel that the normative structures of pesantren do not fully accommodate them. The presence of information technology accelerates this process by granting santri access to cultural expressions previously unknown to them. Transportation infrastructure along the Pantura route also plays a role in strengthening their connection to external cultures. Many santri use these opportunities to attend concerts and join punk communities as a form of identity exploration and self-actualization. The result is a form of cultural hybridity: the *santri punk*.

Identity Crisis: From Alienation to Exploration

The identity crisis experienced by *santri punk* is marked by discomfort with the rigid pesantren culture, which they perceive as inflexible. Dito, one of the research informants, shared that he experienced alienation upon entering the pesantren due to his appearance, which was labeled "naughty" and did not conform to the santri stereotype. Dito felt uneasy with the demands to appear pious, such as wearing a peci

(cap) and sarong, prompting him to seek out a group with similar mindsets where he could express himself authentically.

"I just felt that I didn't fit into the pesantren routine and culture. I also felt ostracized and alienated because the other students viewed me as a naughty person..." (Dito, interview)

Rianto, another informant, also underwent a similar crisis. He found the pesantren routine too monotonous and felt that being a santri was not "cool." He sought alternative spaces for expression and found aspects of appeal in the outsider community, particularly in its solidarity and openness.

"For me, the space for expression in the pesantren felt limited and monotonous, so I felt restricted. I just needed some refreshment by exploring new things." (Rianto, interview)

Meanwhile, Bowo entered the pesantren out of his own will but eventually experienced boredom. This drove him to explore new interests that were not accommodated by the pesantren, such as music and different styles of appearance.

"I think of myself as a simple person. So when I encounter something new, I just want to explore it. While I'm still young, it's good to refresh from the pesantren routine." (Bowo, interview)

These three narratives reveal that the *santri punk*'s identity crisis is not simply a rejection of pesantren culture, but rather a need for self-expression and the exploration of alternative identities more aligned with their self-conceptions (Berger, 1991; Warsito, 2024).

Identity Commitment: Between Achievement and Moratorium

Commitment to identity is an essential part of the self-searching process (Upreti, 2017). In the context of *santri punk*, this process can be categorized into two identity statuses: identity achievement and identity moratorium (Sunuhadi et al., 2013). Dito demonstrates characteristics of identity achievement. He feels a strong

connection to the outsider identity and has rejected invitations to join other subcultures such as metal or ska.

“I feel that I fit here and will continue to be a punk. I feel I have found myself here.” (Dito, interview)

In contrast, Rianto remains in the moratorium stage. He is not yet fully certain about his commitment to the outsider identity, and he feels that his involvement is more a result of boredom with the pesantren routine than a full internalization of punk values.

“I feel both fitting and not fitting with the outsider community. Mostly, I think it’s just boredom with pesantren, and it happens that the outsider community offers solidarity, identity, and so on.” (Rianto, interview)

Bowo experiences something similar. He has not shown full commitment to outsider identity; instead, he is simply interested in exploring new, appealing experiences. For Bowo, outsider is more of a temporary resting place in his journey of self-discovery.

“I just want to make friends. Sure, if there’s something new and interesting, I’ll follow it. For now, I feel comfortable with outsider.” (Bowo, interview)

From these cases, it can be concluded that the identity formation process among *santri punk* is non-linear. Some informants have achieved a self-concept they strongly identify with, while others remain in stages of exploration or searching.

The phenomenon of *santri punk* in Pantura Lamongan demonstrates how traditional institutions like pesantren can become dialectical arenas where local culture and global subcultures interact (Hidayatullah, 2014). The identity crisis experienced by these santri is not merely an act of resistance against norms, but an effort to search for and shape a more authentic self (Kroger, 2006). In this process, some santri show strong commitment to their new identities, while others remain in a phase of

moratorium – illustrating that identity is dynamic and continuously shaped by social contexts and personal experiences.

Conclusion

This study shows that the emergence of *santri punk* in pesantren is influenced by several factors, such as culture shock, social interactions, cultural encounters, solidarity, social identity, and the need for self-actualization. The initial construction of the *santri punk* identity is rooted in the identity crisis experienced by the students – a restlessness towards the traditional santri identity, which they felt did not fully reflect their self-conception. The search for an alternative identity was made possible by the currents of globalization and the development of information technology, which introduced punk culture into the pesantren environment. The *abangan* culture prevalent in Pantura and the pesantren's strategic location along major transportation routes further accelerated santri's access to punk culture through activities such as attending concerts.

The socio-cultural complexity of pesantren in the North Coast (Pantura) region of Lamongan has been a crucial factor enabling the birth of new cultural forms, such as *santri punk*, as a result of these cultural encounters. This study highlights the importance of managing these cultural interactions so that they become a positive force enriching the local culture. Furthermore, this research opens opportunities for further academic exploration, such as studies on the dynamics of conflict between pesantren culture and *santri punk*, patterns of solidarity among *santri punk*, and the phenomenon of emerging new cultures within multicultural pesantren environments.

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