Abstract

This thesis focuses on the relationship between Indonesian kiai (‘ulama: religious leaders) in Jombang to their wider social and political situation. There are three kinds of kiai discussed in the thesis, that is the pesantren kiai, the tarekat kiai, and the kiai involved in politics. Two important aspects of kiai leadership are highlighted. The first is the strong attachment of the kiai to Islam. As a religious leader, this attachment to Islam has resulted in his leadership being generally seen as charismatic. One might therefore pose the question as to whether a change in society’s political and social attitudes has an effect on the pattern of kiai leadership. The second is the independence of each kiai and hence the specific following he maintains. This independence from other kiai indicates that Muslims in Jombang are socially fragmented along the lines of allegiance to various local kiaiship. This means that the authority of the kiai is dispersed. This structural situation creates the possibility of conflict. The unity of Muslim society as a whole can be threatened when conflicts occur between kiai especially in the field of politics. The persistent attachment of the kiai to Islam, moreover, imbues any political conflict with religious justification.

I argue in this thesis that the charismatic authority exerted through the leadership of the kiai in Java has limitations in terms of its legitimacy. At the very least it has boundaries that determine areas or circumstances for its legitimate expression. These boundaries are normative and are loosely expressed by the concept of ‘to struggle for Islam’. This concept can be used by any kiai follower or by groups within society tacitly to evaluate a kiai. As holders of charismatic authority, the kiai can often induce action or emotional responses from their followers since they are held in the high regard. However, in certain situations such authority may be rendered useless when the kiai’s entrenched lines of authority are perceived to deviate from a socially accepted religious base. At this point followers have a possible basis to challenge the legitimacy of the kiai’s pronouncements particularly on social and political issues. Voting in a general election is a good example. The kiai’s encouragement to support a party other than the Islamic party, for example, has incurred negative responses from followers. A few kiai have even been deserted by a large number of their followers because of their political stand.

This thesis further argues that the kiai’s influence in politics is not as strong as in other domains. Despite his being a charismatic figure, only a minority of followers feel compelled to follow the kiai’s political example. Differences between the kiai and his followers in relation to political behaviour are common, especially after the transformation of the Islamic political party. Nevertheless, the role of the kiai in general remains important in the eyes of Muslim society, since the
*kiai* is in the forefront guarding the morality and the religious orthodoxy of Muslim society.