

NAVIGATING INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE: IDENTITY NEGOTIATION TOWARDS INCLUSIVE SOCIETIES IN INDONESIAN RELIGIOUS MILLENARIAN COMMUNITIES

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Abstract

In Indonesia, Religious millenarian communities face pressure to become more open while maintaining their exclusive identities to foster internal cohesion. Previous studies often separate institutional change, identity negotiation, and social inclusion, so they fail to explain how communities move from resistance to strategic engagement. This study examines how identity is negotiated during this orientation shift and how this process reshapes relationships with the community. Using ethnography, the study collected data through observations, semi-structured interviews, and institutional documents at the Wali Barokah Islamic Boarding School, then analysed them thematically. The findings reveal three interconnected processes. First, theological reinterpretation and openness to literature build internal legitimacy for change. Second, selective modernisation expands educational, technological, and socioeconomic capacities while maintaining religious discipline. Third, loosening boundaries allows public services, interfaith encounters, adjustments to religious practices, and closer engagement with religious and state authorities. This study concludes that institutional change can occur without eliminating old identities, while opening new spaces for engagement. Therefore, religious millenarian communities need to design a direction for change that aligns internal improvement, member capacity building, and participation in the public sphere.

Keywords: identity negotiation; institutional change;; millenarian; selective modernization; strategic engagement

INTRODUCTION

Religious millenarian communities are negotiating their identity amidst demands for social openness in the Indonesian context. This process matters because the shift toward strategic engagement changes how members define identity, group boundaries, and relationships with outsiders. Failure to manage this process can prolong stigma, reinforce social distance, and limit intergroup cooperation. In some millenarian movements, demands for openness clash with the need to maintain the authenticity of values that provide members with a sense of security. The responses are varied. Some movements strengthen internal boundaries, while others reinterpret

traditions, change communication methods, and build strategic engagement with external actors. This suggests that inclusion forms through identity negotiations that accompany changes in orientation and must therefore be understood as an ongoing process.

Several studies on millenarianism have shown the relationship between collective safety, group exclusivity, social pressure, and responses to the external environment, but they have paid less attention to patterns of institutional change towards social inclusion. Millenarianism refers to a religious orientation that envisions a transition toward collective salvation and a more perfect order of life, either through divine intervention or actions believed to follow a transcendent plan (Wessinger, 2011). This orientation gives groups a moral framework for assessing the present, determining who belongs to the community of salvation, and envisioning a different future. Prior studies suggest that conflict, withdrawal, and adaptations emerge when millenarian communities face social pressure (Anthony & Robbins, 1997; Wessinger, 2011). Therefore, millenarianism often strengthens when social change creates uncertainty or pressure on group life (Cohn, 2010).

To fill the gap in the literature on institutional transitions toward social inclusion in millenarian groups, it is necessary to analyze this process through institutional and identity studies. Institutional studies literature tends to explain how regulatory pressures, power relations, and capacity to act drive organisational change (Galleli & Amaral, 2026; Ting & Byrne, 2020). According to Nweke et al. (2026), the literature on institutional repositioning further demonstrates the importance of public legitimacy for religious organizations. This study explains changes in institutional representation. In line with repositioning, Identity studies focus on communication processes that affirm membership, manage group boundaries, and gain validation in cross-cultural encounters (Daddow dkk., 2020; Haq & Kwok, 2024; Shamo-Nir & Milford, 2025). Meanwhile, studies of social inclusion tend to focus on interpersonal relationships and community participation (Atkinson dkk., 2020; Dushkova & Ivlieva, 2024; Qi dkk., 2024).

Institutional change refers to the process by which previously taken-for-granted rules, meanings, practices, and relationships are reinterpreted and structured into new patterns (Aksom, 2022; Campbell, 2004). Several studies have emphasised internal dissatisfaction, value commitments, power relations, and organisational capacity to act, framing change as the intersection of context and action (Rahmouni Elidrissi & Courpasson, 2021; Tucker dkk., 2022). Recent evidence expands on this by showing that regulatory, normative, and cognitive pressures, as well as changes at the societal and organisational levels, can trigger change (Bennich, 2024; Tlaiss & Al Waqfi, 2022; Zapp dkk., 2021). The pathways are not always the same. Previous research has distinguished between changes driven by external shocks, institutional entrepreneurship, and shifts in everyday practices (Bennich, 2024; Pereira dkk., 2020;

Shekhar dkk., 2020). Previous research identifies pressures, mechanisms, and outcomes as the main dimensions of institutional change. In this study, these three dimensions help interpret the drive for openness, strategies for reinterpretation and adaptation, and changes in relationships among religious millenarian communities, society, religious authorities, and the state.

Meanwhile, institutional change is inextricably linked to identity negotiation. Identity negotiation refers to the communicative process by which individuals or groups affirm, test, and adjust the meaning of who they are in relation to others (Ting-Toomey, 2014). Ting-Toomey (2014) situates this process within intercultural and cross-border encounters, where personal, relational, and sociocultural identities coexist. Identity negotiation moves through tensions between security and vulnerability, the need for acceptance and differentiation, and the urge to maintain continuity while responding to change. These tensions do not exist in isolation. Communication practices such as identity affirmation, mutual validation, group boundary management, and adjustments in how an identity is presented to others shape how these tensions are processed. Studies on identity work and organisational identity add that narratives, symbols, routines, and external images shape the direction of negotiations when internal understandings confront social judgments. Identity negotiation can be interpreted through three forms: identity needs, communication strategies, and relational outcomes. This framework examines how religious millenarian communities maintain their religious identity, change how they explain it, and expand engagement with society, religious authorities, and the state.

Complementing the study of identity, another study discusses social inclusion. Social inclusion refers to the process of forming social relationships that enable individuals and groups to be present, participate, and be recognised in shared life (Oxoby, 2009; Silver, 2015). Formal access alone does not explain inclusion. According to Silver (2015), exclusion is the breakdown of social ties, the closure of access to institutions, and weakened solidarity. Therefore, inclusion requires restoring relationships that previously limited social membership. Antonsich (2010) adds the element of belonging. A person can be in a space without feeling accepted as part of it. Simplican et al. (2015) identify interpersonal relationships and community participation as the two primary domains that shape inclusion. From these perspectives, social inclusion is a relational process. It develops when social boundaries become more flexible, relationships become reciprocal, and diverse groups gain a legitimate place in shared spaces. In this study, this framework interprets changes in religious millenarian communities through the opening of public spaces, social services, interfaith encounters, adjustments to religious practices, and engagement with state institutions.

The patterns mentioned above still leave an analytical gap. Studies of institutional change tend to position organizations as recipients of pressure, while the

interpretive processes occurring within them receive little attention. Literature on identity negotiation often focuses on interactions between actors and fails to adequately explain how the outcomes of these negotiations alter institutional rules, practices, and relationships. Studies on social inclusion also often discuss access and participation as end-states. They rarely explore the dynamics that precede them. This research offers a different direction by viewing orientation change as an ethnographic process shaped through everyday identity negotiations. It focuses on how millenarian religious communities move from resistance to strategic engagement, reconfiguring internal boundaries and building more open relationships with their social environment. This orientation understands inclusion as a continually negotiated outcome, not a state that emerges automatically after change occurs.

Building on the gap, this study aims to understand how a millenarian religious community negotiates its collective identity as it moves from resistance to strategic engagement. This focus addresses the shortcomings of previous studies that have separated institutional change, identity negotiation, and social inclusion. As a result, the internal processes connecting the three remain largely unexplored, particularly in the daily practices and organizational decisions that shape social relations. This study examines how doctrinal reinterpretation and organizational openness legitimize change. The analysis also focuses on selective modernization in education, technology, and social services. It also examines the loosening of boundaries through public spaces, cross-group encounters, adjustments to religious practices, and more active engagement with state institutions. With this focus, this study demonstrates how identity negotiation shapes change and paves the way for a more inclusive and just society.

This study argues that orientation change occurs when millenarian religious communities shift from defensive identity negotiation to strategic engagement. This shift does not occur because of external pressure alone, but because they build internal legitimacy for change. This legitimacy reduces tension between identity continuity and the social environment's demands for openness. Reinterpretations of values and doctrines change how they present themselves to members and outsiders. Selective modernization expands educational, technological, and devotional capacities while maintaining internal discipline without ceding control over core values and practices. Loosening institutional boundaries strengthens relationships with communities, diverse groups, religious authorities, and state institutions through more measured engagement. Thus, identity negotiation becomes a mechanism linking internal legitimacy, changes in organizational capacity, and the restructuring of institutional relationships.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study's unit of analysis is the Wali Barokah Islamic Boarding School Community, which exhibits millenarian characteristics such as internal transmission of authority, charismatic leadership, collective salvation, and the distinction between congregation and non-congregation (Hilmi, 2012; Majid, 2023). The focus on the community is chosen because the shift from an exclusive to an inclusive group occurs through policies, regulations, educational programs, technology management, social services, and interconnected institutional relationships with religious and state authorities. This pattern demonstrates changes operating at the institutional level. The analysis focuses on how the Islamic boarding school reconfigures identity boundaries in response to demands for openness, modernization, and expanded social engagement in public life. Community decisions and practices are the primary focus. The research explores continuities and shifts in the interpretation of teachings, educational management, technology use, public services, and external relations, demonstrating a gradual shift from resistance to strategic engagement while maintaining the Wali Barokah's internal framework of values, authority, and discipline.

This research employed a qualitative design with an ethnographic approach. This design was chosen because identity change in Islamic boarding schools occurs through meanings, customs, rules, and social relationships that develop within everyday institutional life and cannot be easily separated from the experiences of those involved. This process requires a close examination of the practices, situations, and language used (Blaikie & Priest, 2019). The research was conducted through direct participation in Islamic boarding school activities, observing the use of space, interaction patterns, program implementation, and situations in which identity is explained to the community, religious authorities, and state institutions. Observations took place in their natural context (Blaikie & Priest, 2019). Data from interviews, field notes, and institutional documents were then repeatedly read to identify patterns of change, tension, and continuity that connect reinterpretation of teachings, selective modernization, management of group boundaries, and the expansion of broader social engagement.

This research draws on informant statements, observations, and institutional documents from the Wali Barokah Islamic Boarding School. These three sources were used because changes in organizational identity emerged from participants' accounts, unfolded through daily practices, and left traces in the boarding school's regulations, programs, publications, and official records. Each source reveals a different aspect of the changes. Oral information was obtained from those who understand the interpretation of teachings, educational management, community service systems, social services, and institutional relationships with religious organizations and the state. Observations documented how these changes were implemented. The documents analyzed included worship guidelines, publications, activity records,

educational programs, and institutional records related to the openness of literature, technology use, interfaith relations, public services, and the boarding school’s involvement in the national agenda.

Data were generated using observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation. This sequence was chosen to follow the process of change as it unfolded and to be further explained by those involved in decision-making and the implementation of Islamic boarding school activities. This approach allowed findings to emerge beyond the initial questions. The research began by establishing access, observing routine activities and institutional events, and then recording interactions, conversations, use of space, and organizational responses to outsiders. Interviews were conducted in stages. Follow-up questions were developed from previous field notes, and several issues were reconfirmed through visits, additional conversations, and cross-checking to fully explore changes in attitudes, policies, and practices.

Data were analyzed thematically following the Kiger and Varpio (2020) framework. This technique was used because institutional change emerged as a pervasive pattern in informants’ explanations, daily practices, institutional policies, and Wali Barokah’s relationship with its social environment. The analysis was conducted iteratively to track changes in meaning from one finding to the next. The initial stage began with a thorough reading of field notes, interview transcripts, and documents, then coding sections related to identity, resistance, openness, modernization, and institutional engagement. These codes were then compared and grouped. This process resulted in three main themes: the shift from resistance to strategic engagement, selective modernization, and the shift from boundary maintenance to inclusive engagement.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

From Resistance to Strategic Engagement: Reconfiguring Organizational Identity

Institutional change at the Wali Barokah Islamic Boarding School occurred through a restructuring of how the organization maintained and communicated its identity. Theological legitimacy paved the way for internal change, which then translated into public openness and closer relations with religious and state authorities. This process shifted the boundaries between the group and its social environment. Identity remained intact, but the way it was presented and negotiated changed.

Table 1. Empirical Patterns of Identity Negotiation and Institutional Change

Dimension	Empirical Findings	Sociological Implications
Demystification of Doctrine & Theological Legitimation	The formulation of the “New Paradigm” is grounded in internal theological justification (e.g., the concept of <i>ta’aruf</i> in	Organizational shift occurs substantively via internal theological engineering. Openness is not a superficial

	Al-Hujurat and the historical negotiation of the Hudaibiyah Treaty), rather than merely external pressure. The term <i>manqul</i> is demystified as a traditional <i>sorogan/sanad</i> method, while <i>isrun</i> and <i>bai'at</i> are clarified as standard organizational infaq and discipline, equivalent to practices in <i>tarekat</i> or political parties.	mask (image management) but a reinterpretation of religious texts that legitimizes social integration while maintaining pure <i>sharia</i> principles.
Literature Openness & Everyday Practices	Worship Manuals and compilation books are now assigned ISBNs and distributed freely on e-commerce, marking a “nothing to lose” phase regarding literature secrecy (<i>Bithonah</i>). On a personal level, students avoid theological debates on social media, negotiating their identity through everyday “ <i>Budi Luhur</i> ” (noble character) practices, such as maintaining <i>mahram</i> boundaries and praying on time during secular social gatherings.	Releasing exclusive literature to the public sphere constitutes the highest form of identity negotiation. Students internalize this transformation through concrete actions (<i>dakwah bil hal</i>), effectively dismantling radical narratives without engaging in doctrinal disputes.
Elite Posturing & Synchronization with Mainstream Authorities	Cross-organizational figures (e.g., PCNU) adopt “Theo-Sociological Pragmatism”, prioritizing <i>Ukhuwah Wathoniyah</i> (national brotherhood) to avoid open theological conflicts. Concurrently, Wali Barokah actively engages with the central and local Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) (e.g., visits in Jan 2024, Jan 2025) and aligns Hajj rituals with state regulations.	Risk management is reciprocal among elites. Formal synchronization with the MUI and the Ministry of Religious Affairs proves the organization proactively aligns its internal doctrines with the national Islamic consensus.

Source: Authors’ synthesis of interview, observation, and institutional record data collected at Wali Barokah Islamic Boarding School, 2026.

Table 1 shows that changes at the Wali Barokah Islamic Boarding School developed through restructured teachings, more open literature, and expanded institutional relationships. The New Paradigm drew on the concept of ta’aruf (religious commitment) in Surah Al-Hujurat and the negotiation experience of the Treaty of Hudaibiyah, which was then used to re-explain the terms manqul (authority of Islamic knowledge transmission), isrun (charity), and bai’at (pledge of religious allegiance) within a framework more readily understood by the public. A similar shift emerged when the worship guidebook received an ISBN and was distributed freely through digital platforms. Daily, students increasingly displayed their religious identity through the practice of Budi Luhur (noble character), prayer discipline, and maintaining social boundaries. Meanwhile, Wali Barokah’s elite strengthened communication with Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI), and the Ministry of Religious Affairs, including in adjusting the implementation of the Hajj pilgrimage. These data show gradual change across doctrine, practice, and external relations.

The data show that institutional change follows a consistent pattern. Internal legitimacy emerges first, followed by public disclosure and adjustments to institutional relationships. This sequence demonstrates that organizations are not abandoning their old identities, but rather reconfiguring how those identities are defined and positioned. The next step shifts from strengthening group boundaries to seeking common ground with the broader social environment. Negotiations occur through selection, maintaining core elements while adapting delivery methods. At the elite level, change also appears in efforts to reduce potential conflict and strengthen alignment with religious and state authorities. These findings demonstrate a close relationship between internal reinterpretation, managing identity boundaries, and expanding social acceptance.

Selective Modernization and the Expansion of Institutional Capacity

Modernization at the Wali Barokah Islamic Boarding School occurs through a selection mechanism that distinguishes between elements that are accepted, restricted, and directed. Secular knowledge, learning technology, and formal educational recognition expand students’ capacities beyond the Wali Barokah environment. Internal controls are maintained. This pattern demonstrates that institutional adaptation is geared toward socioeconomic mobility without weakening religious discipline.

Table 2. Patterns of Selective Modernization in Education, Technology, and Religious Service

Dimension	Empirical Findings	Sociological Implications
Multi-talent Education &	Wali Barokah integrates English, accounting, IT, and	Instead of isolating from modernity, the institution

Absorption of Secular Knowledge	entrepreneurship classes (Santri Expo), and encourages students to pursue undergraduate degrees at state and private universities (e.g., Universitas Brawijaya, Universitas Islam Negeri, Universitas Muhammadiyah Sidoarjo). Legally, the institution adaptively transitioned its non-formal education (Equivalency Education at Salafiyah Islamic Boarding Schools, PKPPS) to formal education (senior high school) under the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education.	employs adaptive resistance. It equips students with state-recognized diplomas and secular skills to survive independently within capitalism, without discarding the <i>salaf</i> curriculum.
Technological Adaptation vs. Internal Privacy Regulation	Strict prohibition of personal smartphones is enforced to ensure worship focus (via educational <i>kafaroh</i> sanctions). Conversely, modern teaching media (touchscreen projectors, giant Videotrons for Hajj simulation) are massively utilized. Students also use cashless ID Cards with a daily limit (Rp25,000) for financial management education.	Selective technological filtering is applied. Personal communication tech is rejected to block distractions, yet instructional and financial technologies are fully absorbed, a manifestation of controlled and negotiated modernization.
Modernization of the Devotion System (<i>Mubaligh</i>)	The past devotion system, which required total independence, has transformed. Young preachers deployed across provinces are now provided with proper accommodations and directly immersed in local economic ecosystems (e.g., as logistics distributors, IT technicians, craftsmen) while teaching.	Devotion is no longer merely religious knowledge transfer, but a socio-economic testbed. Students subtly infiltrate broader society, blending in professionally while fulfilling organizational propagation (<i>dakwah</i>) duties.

Source: Authors' synthesis of interview, observation, and institutional record data collected at Wali Barokah Islamic Boarding School, 2026.

Table 2 shows that Wali Barokah Islamic Boarding School has responded to changes in education and technology through selective adjustments. The curriculum now includes English, accounting, information technology, and entrepreneurship, while students are encouraged to continue their studies at state and private universities. The institution's status has also changed, moving from non-formal PKPPS

to a formal high school under the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education. While personal smartphones remain prohibited to maintain focus on worship, modern learning tools, videotron-based Hajj simulations, and cashless identity cards are widely used. The preacher service system has also undergone restructuring. Young preachers now receive adequate housing and engage in local work, such as logistics distribution, information technology, or crafts, while still carrying out their da’wah duties. Education, technology, and service are thus geared toward strengthening students’ socio-economic independence.

These findings demonstrate that modernization in Islamic boarding schools occurs through strict filtering. Elements that support education, skills, and institutional management are accepted, while access to those deemed disruptive to discipline remains restricted. The other pattern is an increasingly strong orientation toward formal recognition. Islamic boarding schools align their curricula and educational status more closely with the national system, ensuring that graduates possess skills applicable beyond their internal environment. Education also shifts toward fostering economic independence and adaptability. Changes to the preacher’s service system further emphasize this direction. Da’wah (preaching) is carried out alongside involvement in local work and life. The organization creates space for modern knowledge, technology, and social mobility while maintaining control over how these elements are used. In this pattern, institutional openness develops without diminishing the disciplinary framework that underpins the Wali Barokah’s identity.

From Boundary Maintenance to Inclusive Institutional Engagement

Institutional change at the Wali Barokah Islamic Boarding School is occurring through a loosening of the boundaries between the internal life of the Islamic boarding school and the wider community. These boundaries are not completely eliminated. They are continually negotiated through the opening of spaces, interfaith encounters, adjustments to Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh) in daily life, and more measured engagement with state institutions. This process allows religious identity to remain a foundation while also creating space for a more open and responsive social presence that embraces diversity.

Table 3. Institutional Practices and Sociological Implications of Inclusive Transformation

Dimension	Empirical Findings	Sociological Implications
Public Space Activation & Social Services	The front area of the Wali Barokah is transformed into an inclusive space. The 99-meter Asmaul Husna Tower serves as an accessible city icon for citizens	Dismantling exclusivity is implemented through asset repurposing. Wali Barokah acts as a sustainable development agent by

	and other religious groups. The institution facilitates a referral <i>Posyandu</i> (integrated health post) integrated with the local <i>Puskesmas</i> (community health center), and collaborates with the National Nutrition Agency.	providing basic health access and safe cultural interaction spaces for civil society across identities.
Religious Moderation & Role in the Third Space (FKUB)	Wali Barokah has been an initiator and active host of the Religious Harmony Forum (FKUB) since the 1998 reform crisis. This is reflected in cross-organizational gatherings (FKPQ) and the use of national attributes (<i>songkok</i>) when Hindu, Christian, and indigenous faith leaders gather inside Wali Barokah.	The FKUB is utilized as a third space to bridge irreconcilable theological gaps. Through this secular-national space, social harmony is successfully realized at the grassroots level.
Fiqh Reconstruction & Cultural Assimilation	The Kyai deconstructs the rigidity of <i>thoharoh</i> (purity) so students do not suffer from excessive doubt when eating at public stalls or using public transport. The practice of mopping the mosque after use by outsiders has been eliminated.	Everyday <i>fiqh</i> deconstruction is key to sociological assimilation. Eroding the obsession with extreme physical purity allows students to interact, worship on campuses, and coexist peacefully with the majority.
Active Neutral Politics & State Law Synergy	There is a shift from exclusive proximity to the New Order regime to an “Active Neutral” stance. Wali Barokah acts as a special polling station (TPS), joins the Peaceful Election Declaration, and regularly invites military, police, prosecutors, and parliament members to educate students on civil/criminal law and constitutional insights.	Instilling national insights eliminates seeds of subversive movements. The organization proves absolute obedience to state law as a form of integration with inclusive and just institutions, rejecting radical methods of conveying aspirations.

Source: Authors’ synthesis of interview, observation, and institutional record data collected at Wali Barokah Islamic Boarding School, 2026.

Table 3 shows four changes observed in the daily life of the Wali Barokah Islamic Boarding School. The first change is evident in the use of the front hall as a more open public space, supported by health services and collaboration with government agencies. In interfaith relations, the Islamic boarding school is actively involved in the FKUB (Religious Forum for Religious Affairs) and serves as a venue for

inter-organizational and interfaith meetings. Changes are also evident in internal religious practices. Kyai (Islamic scholars) are reinterpreting the rules of *thoharah* (purity) to prevent students from becoming trapped in excessive doubt when using public facilities or interacting outside the Islamic boarding school. In the politics, the institution's stance has shifted toward active neutrality. The Islamic boarding school provides polling stations (TPS), participates in declarations of peaceful elections, and brings in state officials to provide students with legal education and national insight.

These findings suggest that institutional change occurs through negotiating boundaries that previously separated Islamic boarding schools from the surrounding social space. These boundaries gradually become more flexible. This process is evident in the way the institution organizes encounters, reinterprets religious practices, and builds relationships with actors outside its community. The Islamic boarding school's identity remains intact as a source of moral orientation, but its expression adapts to meet the needs of broader interactions. Engagement with other religious groups and state institutions also shows a similar trend. Defensive attitudes diminish, while social participation is increasingly recognized as part of institutional responsibility. This pattern shows that inclusivity develops gradually, is negotiated in daily practice, and continually adapts to tensions among religious authority, civic demands, and changes in the social environment.

Discussion

This research shows that identity negotiation is a key mechanism through which the millenarian community at Wali Barokah Islamic Boarding School shifts from resistance to strategic engagement amid institutional change. This change does not occur through erasing old identities. It develops through reinterpretation, incorporating new elements, and restructuring relationships with society, religious authorities, and the state. The first finding shows that theological legitimacy, openness to literature, and communication with mainstream authorities form the basis for reconfiguring organizational identity. The second finding shows selective modernization in education, technology, and the service system that expands students' capacity while maintaining internal discipline. The third finding documents the loosening of social boundaries through public service, interfaith encounters, adjustments to daily Islamic jurisprudence, and engagement with state institutions. All three findings confirm that institutional openness grows through gradual changes that maintain moral continuity while expanding the space for social participation.

Negotiations intensified as Islamic boarding schools had to maintain internal authority while responding to an increasingly open social environment. The post-Reformation 1998 public sphere increased interfaith interaction (Faizah dkk., 2024), expanded oversight of religious institutions (Hizbullah dkk., 2025), and required organizations to explain their positions more openly (Fernandes, 2022). The lives of

Islamic boarding school students (*santri*) also became increasingly connected to formal education, the job market, technology, and intergroup interactions. Theological legitimacy then provided a basis for preventing change from being perceived as a departure from tradition. Filtering modernization allowed skill development and economic capacity without weakening community discipline. Relaxing daily Islamic jurisprudence, social services, interfaith forums, and relations with state institutions opened more spaces for encounter and reduced previously maintained social distances. Thus, institutional change arose from the need to maintain internal recognition while gaining broader acceptance in a pluralistic society.

These findings suggest that institutional change operates by reorganizing identity boundaries while maintaining religious foundations. From Tilly's (2015) perspective, collective identity persists as social boundaries are continually negotiated amidst increasing interaction with other groups. This process also aligns with the concept of institutional work, namely, the purposeful action of maintaining, changing, or reshaping institutions (Beunen & Patterson, 2019; Lawrence, 2010). The literature on theological legitimacy and openness shows the symbolic work that makes change acceptable without disrupting doctrinal continuity. Selective modernization demonstrates that education, technology, and devotion are absorbed as long as they strengthen organizational capacity and remain subject to internal discipline. The loosening of everyday Islamic jurisprudence, interfaith forums, and relations with the state transform rigid boundaries into more flexible ones in social practice. This research finds that formerly exclusive institutions can reshape their boundaries to maintain legitimate identities internally and gain external acceptance.

Gradually controlled change gives millenarian groups the space to adapt without triggering significant internal resistance. These adjustments gain support through the language and rules members already know. On the other hand, relying on elite legitimacy makes reform direction easy to centralize and hard to test from below. The most obvious advantage is their increased ability to build public trust, expand collaboration, and reduce tensions with the social environment. Risks arise when outward openness is not matched by transparent decision-making, leaving members as mere implementers of change. Strong control can also create double standards, as the community appears inclusive in the public sphere but still restricts dissenting voices internally. Sustainable transformation depends on balancing community control, internal accountability, and members' opportunities to help shape the direction of change.

These findings extend the study of millenarianism by demonstrating how millenarian religious communities navigate institutional change to ensure their survival. These changes occur without disrupting the identity that has underpinned internal recognition. What shifts is how communities explain their teachings, absorb modernity, and build social relationships. The literature on identity change has

examined how external imagery, member interpretations, and adaptive demands shape community redefinition (León Gómez, 2019; Teller, 2020; Zoehrer & Pokorny, 2022). Identity ambiguity, group culture, and leadership also drive change when established structures face institutional pressures (Jensen, 2022; Valle, 2017; Zoehrer & Pokorny, 2022). Other research has shown that identity continuity can be maintained through transitional identities and organisational reformulation (Bourdeaux, 2022; Clark dkk., 2010; Teimouri, 2022). However, millenarian community change mechanisms require attention. This research identifies gradual identity negotiation as a mechanism of change in a religious millenarian community moving from internal legitimacy, through selective modernization, to more inclusive institutional engagement.

Communities with a millenarian religious character need to develop a roadmap for change that connects internal renewal, member capacity building, and public engagement. Changes directed solely at the external sphere risk stalling at symbolic openness. Conversely, internal adjustments without clear communication can keep the organization distant from the community. In the initial stages, organizations should hold regular forums where members can understand, assess, and contribute to new interpretations and policies. Educational programs, technology use, and community service should also be evaluated using indicators such as benefits to members, participation levels, and impact on organizational discipline. Externally, collaborations with the government and various groups should be complemented by accountability mechanisms, open documentation, and accessible complaint channels. This series of actions can maintain consistency in change while preventing a gap between public openness and the organization's internal practices.

CONCLUSION

Institutional change can occur without disrupting existing identities when millenarian communities negotiate their identities while opening up space for new forms of engagement. This approach reduces the perception that reform threatens the beliefs, rules, and history that have underpinned communal life. Internal acceptance is thus more likely. At Wali Barokah, this process began with theological reinterpretation, openness to literature, and adjustments to relationships with mainstream authorities. The community then selectively embraced modernization through education, technology, and a service system that remained under the organization's control. In subsequent stages, social services, interfaith encounters, adjustments to daily Islamic jurisprudence, and engagement with the state expanded the community's presence in the public sphere. This experience confirms that inclusivity can grow when identity continuity and institutional change are treated as mutually reinforcing processes.

This research contributes to the formulation of gradual identity negotiation as a way to explain institutional change in religious millenarian groups. This concept shows that change does not occur in one leap. It moves through interrelated stages and remains rooted in internal sources of legitimacy. At Wali Barokah, this process began when the organization's teachings and terms were reinterpreted to be explained more openly. Change then continues through the adoption of education, technology, and service patterns filtered through organizational needs and discipline. The next stage is seen in the expansion of social services, interfaith relations, adjustments to everyday jurisprudence, and involvement with state institutions. This framework enriches the study of institutional change by showing that identities are not simply maintained or changed, but are negotiated throughout the process of adaptation.

This study has limitations because it focuses only on a single millenarian religious community. This choice allows for an ethnographic reading of the process of change in Wali Barokah. However, the findings remain closely tied to this community's local history, leadership structures, and social experiences. The shift from internal legitimacy and selective modernization to more inclusive engagement cannot be assumed to apply in the same way elsewhere. Other communities may face different pressures, have dissimilar sources of authority, or undergo shorter or more conflicted paths to change. Therefore, further studies are needed to compare several communities in different social contexts to more rigorously examine patterns of identity negotiation. Comparative studies are needed to test whether the patterns of identity negotiation found in Wali Barokah also emerge in other communities.

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