

## **PHILANTHROPY AMONG EMERGING MIDDLE-CLASS MUSLIMS IN THE INTEGRATED ISLAMIC SCHOOLS NETWORK (JSIT): NEGOTIATING RELIGIOUS COMMODIFICATION AND SOCIAL PIETY**

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**Abstract:** *This article examines the reciprocal relationship between the commodification of religion and philanthropic practices at integrated Islamic primary schools within the Integrated Islamic Schools Network (JSIT) in Ponorogo, East Java. Using an ethnographic case study, the research focuses on middle-class Muslim families to understand how religious and philanthropic activities are transformed into commodities. Data were collected through interviews, observations, and documentation involving middle-class Muslims and educators from the tarbiyah community, affiliated with the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS). The study reveals that the rise of the Muslim middle class in Ponorogo, reflecting broader national trends, is shaped by political, cultural, and ideological dynamics. A key finding is the transformation of parental philanthropy into a form of “social piety,” where giving is reframed as both religious devotion and social responsibility. Schools and educators actively cultivate this practice by repackaging Islamic values into attractive commodities that align with middle-class aspirations. The study contributes by showing how philanthropy functions not only as an economic resource but also as a cultural and political instrument in shaping Muslim middle-class identity. It advances debates on the commodification of religion and highlights the socio-political role of philanthropy in contemporary Indonesian Islam.*

**Keywords:** *Philanthropy; JSIT; Middle Class Muslims; Commodification of Religion; Social Piety Expression*

### **Introduction**

In the social sphere, religion is not only limited to doctrines or transcendental beliefs but also manifests as a social fact embedded in material practices, rites, ideologies, and concrete expressions in everyday life. Humans often translate abstract ideologies into tangible forms, and religion is no exception. In the Indonesian context, Islamic identity is expressed through visible symbols such as clothing (hijab, kopyah, sarong), consumer products (halal cosmetics, medicines), slogans (returning to the Qur'an and hadith), and lifestyle choices, including the preference for Islamic-

branded products and services such as sharia banking, Islamic housing, pawnshops, event organizers, and education.<sup>1</sup>

Over the past two decades, the rise of the urban Muslim middle class has amplified the visibility of such expressions. This group, driven by strong religiosity, consumer purchasing power, and aspirations for modern yet Islamic lifestyles, has contributed to the expansion of a national Islamic economic market.

Previous studies have shown that this middle class not only participates in religious consumption but also integrates their piety into education and philanthropic activities. For instance, Ghanea Bassiri<sup>2</sup> describe how the Muslim middle class increasingly channels religiosity through Islamic consumer culture, from fashion to financial products. Mahmud<sup>3</sup> highlights how Islamic values are embedded into educational and workplace ethics, demonstrating the intertwining of piety with aspirations for modern professionalism. Similarly, Pallas<sup>4</sup> (2012; 2016) examines Islamic philanthropy in Indonesia, showing how zakat institutions and charitable foundations connect middle-class religiosity with social welfare and education initiatives. These works collectively indicate that religious consumption, education, and philanthropy are mutually reinforcing practices among Indonesian Muslims, shaping both personal identity and community development.

While earlier research has explored the political mobilization of this demographic by parties such as the Partai Keadilan Sejahtera (PKS), fewer studies have specifically examined this interplay in semi-urban and culturally Islamic regions like Ponorogo. As also suggested by a reviewer's comment, this study seeks to address that gap by focusing on how middle-class Muslim families in Ponorogo engage with Integrated Islamic Elementary Schools (*Sekolah Dasar Islam Terpadu*) under the *Jaringan Sekolah Islam Terpadu* (JSIT) network.

(<sup>5</sup> fewer studies have examined the interplay between religious consumption, education, and philanthropy in semi-urban and culturally Islamic regions like Ponorogo.

In Ponorogo historically rooted in traditional Islam through the legacy of the Demak Bintoro Sultanate and Tegalsari Islamic Boarding School the emergence

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<sup>1</sup> Yusuf Hanafi et al., "The New Identity of Indonesian Islamic Boarding Schools in the 'New Normal': The Education Leadership Response to COVID-19," *Heliyon* 7, no. 3 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2021.e06549>.

<sup>2</sup> K Ghanea Bassiri, "American Muslim Philanthropy after 9/11," *Journal on Muslim Philanthropy and Civil Society* 1, no. 1 (2017), <https://doi.org/10.18060/21415>.

<sup>3</sup> M Bt Mahmud, N A Bazilah Bt Mohd Zain, and R Firdaus Bt Fatah Yasin, "Participation of Muslim Women in Islamic Philanthropy in Digital Era: Malaysian Experience," *Afkaruna* 15, no. 2 (2019), <https://doi.org/10.18196/AIJIS.2019.0101.165-186>.

<sup>4</sup> A Fallas, "Charity and Philanthropy in Middle East History," *History Compass* 21, no. 3-4 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.1111/hic3.12760>.

<sup>5</sup> R Muary and P Atikah, "Tahfidz Al Quran Class: Religion Commodification and Popular Culture in Muslim Middle Class," *Jurnal Ilmu Sosial Dan Ilmu Politik Malikussaleh (JSPM)* 4, no. 1 (2023): 49, <https://doi.org/10.29103/jspm.v4i1.10097>.

of JSIT institutions has introduced a more revivalist, expressive model of Islamic identity. Parents' active participation in school-based philanthropy, framed as *amal jariyah* (ongoing charity), reflects both the desire to display *piety-in-action* and the adoption of a modern, exclusive Islamic brand of education. While such practices appear as religious devotion, they also intersect with economic and institutional logics, raising critical questions about the commodification of Islam in education.

This study departs from previous work by employing Pierre Bourdieu's theory of social and cultural reproduction to analyze how *habitus*, *cultural capital*, and *symbolic capital* shape and are shaped by the JSIT educational arena. The *habitus* of Ponorogo's middle-class Muslim families—structured by revivalist interpretations of Islam, aspirations for upward mobility, and a desire for moral safeguarding of children—intersects with the *field* of Islamic education, where schools operate as both sites of religious socialization and competitive service providers. Philanthropic engagement, in this context, becomes not merely an act of worship but also a transaction that converts economic capital into symbolic capital, reinforcing both religious identity and social distinction.

By situating JSIT's philanthropic model within the agency-structure dialectic, this study examines whether such practices are better understood as a straightforward commodification of religion or as a negotiated space where institutional interests and genuine religiosity coexist. This dual lens allows us to move beyond descriptive accounts of Islamic commodification and towards a critical understanding of how religious meaning, social reproduction, and market logics interact in contemporary Indonesian Islamic education.

The novelty of this research lies in its application of Bourdieu's theoretical framework to the case of semi-urban Islamic education in Ponorogo, a setting that has received far less scholarly attention compared to urban centers like Jakarta or Yogyakarta. By foregrounding the interrelation between religious consumption, education, and philanthropy, this study contributes to the literature in two important ways. First, it demonstrates how middle-class Muslim families mobilize various forms of capital within the JSIT network, thereby offering fresh insights into the mechanisms of social reproduction in Islamic schooling. Second, it shows how philanthropic practices, when analyzed through the lens of symbolic capital, are not reducible to commodification alone but reveal a dynamic negotiation between piety, social distinction, and institutional interests. These contributions enrich both the sociology of religion in Indonesia and broader debates on Islamic education, middle-class religiosity, and the moral economies of giving.

## **Method**

To address the research objectives, this study employs a qualitative ethnographic approach within the framework of a field study mode <sup>6</sup>. More specifically, it adopts an organizational ethnography perspective, as the focus is on the culture, practices, and interactions within Integrated Islamic Elementary Schools (*Sekolah Dasar Islam Terpadu*, SDIT) under the *Jaringan Sekolah Islam Terpadu* (JSIT) in Ponorogo. This approach is relevant because the research examines not only individual behaviour but also institutional norms, strategies, and social contexts that shape the philanthropic engagement of middle-class Muslim families. Data collection was conducted over an extended period to enable the researcher to build trust, gain insider perspectives, and understand the lived experiences of participants. Instead of using technical anthropological terms such as *emic* or *epoche*, this study refers to this process as developing an insider understanding of participants' viewpoints and motivations while remaining critically reflective of the researcher's own position<sup>7</sup>.

The research combined participant observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis. Participant observation involved direct involvement in school-related activities such as parent-teacher meetings, fundraising events, and religious programs, while also observing daily interactions between staff, parents, and students. This provided first-hand insights into how philanthropic activities were framed and enacted in practice. In-depth interviews were carried out with three main groups: parents or guardians of students—particularly those actively engaged in school philanthropy—school administrators and teachers responsible for fundraising and community relations, and local community figures familiar with Ponorogo's Islamic educational traditions<sup>8</sup>. Informants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure diversity in socioeconomic backgrounds within the middle-class Muslim community. In addition, internal school documents, fundraising reports, promotional materials, and public communications such as brochures and social media posts were collected and analyzed to identify how the school markets its educational services and frames its philanthropic initiatives.

The data were analyzed using Pierre Bourdieu's theory of cultural and social reproduction <sup>9</sup>, which provided a conceptual framework for interpreting the formation and reinforcement of Islamic identity among middle-class Muslims. The concept of *habitus* was used to explore how parents' values, lifestyles, and aspirations shaped their decisions to choose JSIT schools and participate in philanthropic

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<sup>6</sup> T R Lindlof and Bryan C Taylor, *Qualitative Communication Research Methods* (Sage Publication, 2017).

<sup>7</sup> T Lillis, "Ethnography as Method, Methodology, and "Deep Theorizing," *Written Communication* 25, no. 3 (2008): 353–388, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0741088308319229>.

<sup>8</sup> J Corbin and A Strauss, *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory*, 4th ed. (Sage Publications, 2015).

<sup>9</sup> P Bourdieu, "Cultural Reproduction and Social Reproduction," in *Knowledge, Education, and Cultural Change* (Routledge, 2018), 71–112; Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron, *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture* (Sage Publication, 1990).

activities. The notion of *cultural capital* helped identify the religious knowledge, symbolic practices, and educational credentials that parents and schools mobilized to construct and display a kaffah Islamic identity. *Symbolic capital* was employed to analyze how philanthropic contributions were transformed into markers of social prestige and piety within the school community. Finally, the concept of *field* was applied to situate JSIT schools within the wider educational landscape of Ponorogo, highlighting their competitive positioning against traditional and non-Islamic institutions<sup>10</sup>. By integrating ethnographic fieldwork with Bourdieu's theoretical concepts, this study moves beyond a descriptive account of philanthropic behaviour, offering a critical interpretation of how these practices intersect with the commodification of religion, the reproduction of Islamic identity, and the negotiation between genuine religiosity and institutional interests.

## **Result and Discussion**

### ***Philanthropy in JSIT Ponorogo***

#### **a. Mechanisms of Philanthropy**

Philanthropic practices within JSIT-affiliated schools in Ponorogo demonstrate a sophisticated and multifaceted approach to resource mobilization. Unlike informal giving, donations are solicited through structured, institutionalized channels that blend religious motivation with practical fundraising needs.<sup>11</sup> At the core of these mechanisms are regular parent meetings and school events, which provide a platform for direct appeals from the Qurrota A'yun Foundation management. These appeals are carefully framed with religious references—Qur'anic verses and prophetic traditions (hadith) that extol the virtues of charity (sadaqah), zakat, and waqf<sup>12</sup>. This integration of scriptural authority serves not only as spiritual encouragement but also as a legitimizing discourse that transforms financial contributions into acts of religious merit. Additionally, digital communication technologies, such as WhatsApp groups, have become crucial for reaching parents in a timely and personal manner.

The use of WhatsApp broadcasts ensures a continuous flow of reminders and updates, reinforcing the moral obligation to give and keeping the philanthropic agenda at the forefront of parents' minds. This method reflects a modernization of traditional Islamic charity practices, blending the communal

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<sup>10</sup> David M Fetterman, *Ethnography; Step by Step* (Sage Publication, 1997); John Van Maanen, *Tales of the Field on Writing Ethnography* (Chicago University Press, 2011).

<sup>11</sup> Maria Anna Muryani et al., "The Role of Donation-Based Crowdfunding Platforms in Improving People's Welfare (Study on the Kitabisa.Com)," *JED (Jurnal Etika Demokrasi)* 8, no. 3 (2023): 373–82, <https://doi.org/10.26618/jed.v8i3.10860>.

<sup>12</sup> S B Istiyanto and R D Kusumawati, "Does The Sexual Violence The Fault Of Man Or The Fault Of Woman's Stupidity? When Religious Commodification and Offensive Marketing Go Hand in Hand," *ETTISAL: Journal of Communication* 8, no. 2 (2024): 129–145, <https://doi.org/10.21111/ejoc.v8i2.11643>.

spirit of giving with contemporary digital outreach. Moreover, the Foundation utilizes visible, public markers of philanthropy such as billboards or posters placed strategically around school premises. These displays often quote religious exhortations and frame donations as a form of ‘jihad fi sabilillah’—struggle in the way of God—adding an element of spiritual warfare and heroic struggle to the act of giving. This public visibility not only normalizes giving but also subtly exerts social pressure on parents to participate, reinforcing philanthropy as a normative, expected behavior within the community<sup>13</sup>.

b. Religious Narratives and Legitimacy

Religious discourse is instrumental in shaping parents’ perceptions of philanthropy as an expression of symbolic piety. Parents do not view their donations merely as financial transactions but as meaningful acts of worship that affirm their Islamic identity and spiritual commitment.<sup>14</sup> For example, interviewees expressed feelings of spiritual fulfillment and increased faith through giving, interpreting their contributions as investments in both worldly benefits and eternal rewards. The deployment of metaphors likening charity to “grains of rice that multiply” draws from Qur’anic imagery that symbolizes God’s generosity and blessings. This framing evokes a transactional spirituality where giving money is linked to the promise of divine multiplication of rewards, making philanthropy both a moral obligation and a hopeful act of spiritual economy. Waqf contributions are particularly significant because they embody the concept of *amal jariyah*—continuous charity that benefits the donor even after death. This theological foundation encourages parents to view their donations not simply as one-off gifts but as lasting legacies that provide spiritual dividends over time, heightening the perceived religious value of their philanthropic acts.

c. The Role of the Qurrota A’yun Foundation

The Qurrota A’yun Foundation functions as the primary agent in the local educational arena, orchestrating both the educational programs and the philanthropic ecosystem surrounding them. Its central role is evidenced by its ability to mobilize resources effectively, maintain a strong presence in the community, and construct a compelling religious-commercial narrative that ties the school’s growth to religious virtue. By positioning itself as a guardian of Islamic education tailored for the middle class, the Foundation secures a dual legitimacy: religious authority through its invocation of Islamic teachings and

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<sup>13</sup> K D Saputra et al., “Historical Continuity and Changes: Understanding the Dynamics of Islamic Education in Indonesia and Malaysia,” *Jurnal Tarbiyatuna* 13, no. 2 (2022): 107–118, <https://doi.org/10.31603/tarbiyatuna.v13i2.7345>.

<sup>14</sup> Zulfahmi Alwi, Rika Dwi Ayu Parmitasari, and Alim Syariati, “An Assessment on Islamic Banking Ethics through Some Salient Points in the Prophetic Tradition,” *Heliyon* 7, no. 5 (2021): e07103, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2021.e07103>.

social legitimacy through its provision of quality education<sup>15</sup>. This dual legitimacy affords it considerable influence over parental behaviors and expectations, allowing it to frame donations not simply as contributions but as investments in the broader project of Islamic educational and moral development. Furthermore, the Foundation's market segmentation strategy reflects a keen understanding of its target demographic—urban middle-class Muslims with sufficient economic means and strong religious aspirations.<sup>16</sup> The prevalence of private vehicles at school hours and the socio-economic background of parents (entrepreneurs, office workers) illustrate this segment's purchasing power and willingness to invest heavily in their children's education. Such economic capacity enables the Foundation to sustain itself financially through tuition and philanthropic donations, creating a synergistic relationship between educational services and financial contributions.

d. Middle-Class Muslim Characteristics

The middle-class Muslim parents engaged in JSIT Ponorogo embody a distinct habitus shaped by a convergence of religious devotion, socio-economic privilege, and cultural modernity. Their religious expressions encompass outward symbols such as wearing the jilbab (headscarf), regular Qur'an recitation, participation in religious study groups, and attendance at Islamic cultural events, marking them as visibly pious within their communities.<sup>17</sup> Economically, these parents demonstrate disposable income sufficient to engage in educational philanthropy, beyond basic tuition fees. Their capacity to donate voluntarily, purchase waqf land shares, or contribute to infrastructure projects reflects not only financial means but also a cultural valuation of philanthropy as a social and religious responsibility.<sup>18</sup> Parental perceptions of philanthropy are thus multifaceted: it is a spiritual obligation, a social performance of belonging and identity, and a form of investment in their children's educational and moral futures. By participating in these practices, they reinforce their belonging to a religiously grounded middle class that prizes both faithfulness and modern social status.

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<sup>15</sup> D Suryana and T Handoko, "Islamic Commodification in Representation of Political Development in Indonesia: A Systematic Literature Review," *Hayula: Indonesian Journal of Multidisciplinary Islamic Studies* 7, no. 1 (2023): 51–76, <https://doi.org/10.21009/hayula.007.01.04>.

<sup>16</sup> Serli Widia Astuti, "Segmentation and Target Markets for Islamic Education Services," in *Proceeding of International Conference on Education, Society and Humanity*, vol. 02, 2024, 253–57.

<sup>17</sup> Mohamed Sulthan Ismiya Begum, "Hijab (Veil) from the Islamic Perspective: An Interpretive Analysis from the Quran and Scholars' Views," *MAQOLAT: Journal of Islamic Studies* 3, no. 2 (2025): 211–26, <https://doi.org/10.58355/maqolat.v3i2.145>.

<sup>18</sup> Faiza Elmahgop et al., "The Socio-Economic Impacts of Waqf Investment Funds as a Model for Sustainable Financing in Saudi Arabia," *Sustainability (Switzerland)* 17, no. 9 (2025), <https://doi.org/10.3390/su17093805>.

## **Navigating Symbolic Piety and Market Logic: Parental Habitus, Capital, and the Educational Arena in JSIT Ponorogo**

This study's application of Bourdieu's theoretical framework reveals a nuanced understanding of how middle-class Muslim parents in Ponorogo engage in philanthropic practices within the Islamic educational field, particularly at JSIT-affiliated schools. The concept of parental habitus provides a valuable lens to interpret the enduring dispositions and cultural logics that shape giving behaviors<sup>19</sup>. Here, philanthropy transcends mere religious obligation; it becomes a performative act embedded within a middle-class modern Islamic identity, where charity is ritualized and strategically visible. Parental habitus at JSIT Ponorogo reflects an intricate synthesis of traditional Islamic teachings on zakat, sadaqah, and waqf with contemporary social expectations of structured and public philanthropy. Unlike spontaneous acts of giving, these donations are embedded in institutional routines—parent meetings, digital group messages, and public displays—that cultivate a shared culture of generosity as a marker of belonging. This ritualization is an important novelty because it illustrates how Islamic philanthropy is institutionalized and standardized within educational settings, shaping not only spiritual behaviors but also social relations and identity formation in ways that previous studies on Islamic giving have rarely examined with such specificity at the micro-level.

Moving beyond habitus, the concept of symbolic capital illuminates the social and cultural rewards that accompany philanthropic contributions.<sup>20</sup> Donations confer more than religious merit—they also grant parents enhanced social legitimacy and prestige within the JSIT educational arena. This finding fills a gap in the literature by showing how middle-class Muslim philanthropy is not solely motivated by altruism or spiritual gains but also by the desire to accumulate symbolic capital that secures social status and influence within elite Islamic educational circles. This dual logic of religious and social capital accumulation deepens our understanding of how economic capacity and religious expression interlink in contemporary Muslim middle-class formations. The JSIT schools as an educational arena represent a complex site of symbolic struggle, where pure religious values often contend with pragmatic institutional demands. The Foundation's role as a mediator underscores the ambivalent nature of philanthropy in this setting: while donations are framed as acts of piety and jihad, they simultaneously function as essential financial resources ensuring the schools' survival and expansion. This tension between spiritual authenticity and market logic reveals a form of commodification that is neither entirely commercial nor purely religious, but a hybrid space shaped by the pressures

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<sup>19</sup> Nita Alexander, Theresa Petray, and Ailie McDowall, "Conscientisation and Radical Habitus: Expanding Bourdieu's Theory of Practice in Youth Activism Studies," *Youth* 2, no. 3 (2022): 295–308, <https://doi.org/10.3390/youth2030022>.

<sup>20</sup> Putri Dwi Permata Indah, Aini Inayah, and Glenn Vicko Harianto, "Cultural and Symbolic Capital in the Educational Aspirations of International School Students," *Journal of Social Dynamics and Governance* 1, no. 2 (2024): 92–100.



of social reproduction and institutional sustainability. This study advances academic discourse by critically elaborating this ambivalence, demonstrating that the commodification of Islamic philanthropy in education is not a simple erosion of faith but a complex negotiation between competing logics. It challenges existing dichotomies in the literature that treat commodification and religiosity as mutually exclusive, offering instead a nuanced portrait of how Islamic educational philanthropy is practiced and rationalized in a modern Indonesian context. In sum, the research fills a notable gap by combining Bourdieu's sociological tools with ethnographic insights from JSIT Ponorogo, revealing how middle-class Muslim parents' philanthropic habitus, the accrual of symbolic capital, and the educational arena interact dynamically to reproduce social hierarchies and religious identities. This contributes novel empirical evidence to debates on the commercialization of religion, social reproduction, and the evolving nature of Islamic education in Southeast Asia.

### **Analysis of the Commodification of Islam in JSIT Ponorogo**

This study sheds important light on how Islamic philanthropy within JSIT Ponorogo embodies a commodified form of piety, a phenomenon that warrants critical scrutiny. While philanthropy is traditionally understood as a sincere religious obligation motivated by spiritual values such as generosity and communal solidarity, the findings reveal that in this context, religious giving is deeply entangled with institutional objectives and economic imperatives. The commodification here does not merely imply a superficial commercialization but a sophisticated integration of religious narratives into a market-oriented framework supporting the school's financial sustainability.

JSIT schools' solicitation of donations, waqf land purchases, and fundraising campaigns are embedded with Quranic verses and hadiths to evoke moral responsibility and spiritual reward. This framing effectively mobilizes religious values as institutional capital, transforming acts of giving into symbolic transactions that benefit both donors and the educational institution. Parents interpret their contributions as 'jihad' or spiritual struggle, reinforcing their religious identity while simultaneously underwriting the school's expansion. This dual function illustrates how religious symbolism becomes a resource leveraged for organizational growth. Importantly, the commodification of philanthropy at JSIT Ponorogo exemplifies a contradiction between religiosity and market logic that is neither fully resolved nor outright rejected by participants. Parents often experience a genuine spiritual satisfaction, but their donations also reflect middle-class aspirations for social recognition and educational quality. This ambivalence challenges simplistic binaries in existing literature that portray commodification as inherently secularizing or corrupting. Instead, this study advances the discourse by highlighting how religious and market logics coexist in tension, generating a hybrid space where faith and

finance intersect in mutually constitutive ways. This nuanced insight into the commodification of Islam in education contributes a novel empirical perspective from a provincial, middle-class Muslim context, distinct from the urban or commercialized settings commonly examined. It calls for more careful theorization of commodification that accounts for local religious sensibilities and the complex motivations behind philanthropic practices.

### **Critical Elaboration of Bourdieu's Theory of Social Reproduction in JSIT Ponorogo**

Employing Bourdieu's theory of social reproduction, this research reveals how philanthropic practices in JSIT Ponorogo serve to reproduce the habitus and social positioning of the Muslim middle class. Through consistent acts of giving, parents affirm and perpetuate their identity as pious, responsible, and socially respectable members of their community. These philanthropic engagements are not random but reflect deep-seated dispositions shaped by a middle-class habitus that merges religious devotion with socio-economic ambition. The study highlights how parents use **cultural and symbolic capital** to consolidate their standing within the educational field. Philanthropic contributions, beyond their economic value, function as markers of distinction that help families negotiate their place in the social hierarchy. This capital manifests in increased social influence within the school community, often granting donors privileged access to school events, decision-making forums, and social networks, thereby reinforcing symbolic domination by the Foundation and its leadership. The Foundation itself emerges as a dominant agent exercising symbolic power over parents by shaping the norms of giving and framing philanthropy as both a religious duty and a pathway to social prestige. This dynamic reflects Bourdieu's concept of symbolic domination, where power is maintained through the consent of those subordinated, in this case, parents who internalize and reproduce the Foundation's values and fundraising practices. This relationship sustains a cycle where social inequalities are both enacted and legitimized through philanthropic participation.

Crucially, this analysis exposes how JSIT Ponorogo's philanthropic model functions as a mechanism for social reproduction, ensuring that middle-class Muslim families maintain their socio-religious capital and pass it to future generations through education. This insight fills a gap in scholarship that has often overlooked the micro-level social processes linking philanthropy, education, and class formation in Islamic contexts. The empirical findings from JSIT Ponorogo provide a valuable counterpoint to and extension of existing literature on Islamic philanthropy and commodification. For example, studies by Makiah et al. and Wildan & Witriani emphasize the aestheticization and consumerization of Islam in urban, metropolitan contexts, highlighting how religious identity is packaged for consumption. While these studies offer important macro-level insights, the Ponorogo case illustrates how similar processes unfold in a provincial, middle-class setting where community ties,

local religious traditions, and educational aspirations intersect. Unlike predominantly commercial or cosmopolitan contexts, the philanthropy at JSIT Ponorogo is deeply embedded in local religious narratives and social structures, which inform parental motivations and institutional strategies. This local specificity shows how Islamic philanthropy remains a site for both faithful expression and social distinction, mediated by enduring cultural frameworks such as *kejawen* and *pesantren* influences unique to East Java. Moreover, the findings challenge assumptions that commodification necessarily undermines religious authenticity. Instead, they suggest a **coexistence and negotiation** of religious and market logics at the grassroots, extending theoretical discussions beyond the often polarized debates on commercialization versus piety. In the broader national context, Ponorogo reflects wider trends of the rising Muslim middle class in Indonesia, which combines religious renewal with socio-economic modernization, as documented by Hidayah and Nasiwan <sup>21</sup>. However, this study contributes novelty by focusing on the educational philanthropy sphere, an underexplored site of middle-class identity formation and social reproduction in Indonesian Islamic studies.

### ***JSIT Ponorogo, Philanthropy in Islamic Education and Commodification***

Commodification in Islam is a multifaceted phenomenon that has been extensively researched and analyzed in various contexts. Scholars have explored the commodification of religion within the Islamic framework, emphasizing how Islamic products and symbols have been commercialized for profit rather than being deeply rooted in religious practice and sentiment <sup>22</sup>. This profit-oriented shift has resulted in the transformation of Islamic symbols and expressions into commodities or business objects, moving away from their original religious significance <sup>23</sup>. The commodification of Islam is particularly noticeable among middle-class Muslims, where religious products are often tailored more towards maximizing profits rather than upholding religious values <sup>24</sup>. Furthermore, the commodification of Islam extends beyond products and symbols to encompass broader aspects of Muslim life and culture. The commercialization of Muslim life has been associated with the

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<sup>21</sup> S N Hidayah, "Pesantren for Middle-Class Muslims in Indonesia (Between Religious Commodification and Pious Neoliberalism)," *QIJIS (Qudus International Journal of Islamic Studies* 9, no. 1 (2021): 209, <https://doi.org/10.21043/qijis.v9i1.7641>.

<sup>22</sup> Hidayah.

<sup>23</sup> M Maftukhatulosikhah and M Rusydi, "The Commodification of Religion in the Maq id Al-Shariah Perspective," *Mazāhib* 17, no. 2 (2018): 35-60, <https://doi.org/10.21093/mj.v17i2.1188>.

<sup>24</sup> Muary and Atikah, "Tahfidz Al Quran Class: Religion Commodification and Popular Culture in Muslim Middle Class."

commodification of religious symbols, illustrating how global capitalism has influenced and reshaped Islam into an object of consumerism <sup>25</sup>.

This trend is further highlighted in the convergence of religion commodification and the expression of piety through practices like halal certification, where profit-driven motives often overshadow core Islamic values and principles <sup>26</sup>. While the rise of religious commodification may not necessarily contradict existing religious teachings, it does have the potential to undermine the intrinsic values of religiosity and sacredness within Islam <sup>27</sup>. In the realm of Islamic education, the secularization of educational institutions has been identified as a contributing factor to the dilution of Islamic educational objectives, reflecting a broader trend of commodification within educational settings <sup>28</sup>.

This secular influence intertwines with the commodification of Islam, which is recognized as one of the significant perspectives alongside radicalism and terrorism in shaping contemporary Islamic discourse <sup>29</sup>. The commodification of Islam has also permeated popular piety in Indonesia, where it is not only seen through the lenses of commodification and consumerism but also as an "aestheticization" of Islam, fostering diverse interpretations of the faith <sup>30</sup>. In the educational environment, the trend of commodification of religion can be seen through the participation of student guardians in education. The new trend in educational institutions involving student guardian participation is one of the entrances for educational institutions to take advantage of this moment as a niche to develop institutions massively.

This participation is mostly in the form of monetary donations. In educational institutions that are included in schools with an Integrated Islamic School Network, especially in Ponorogo District, this phenomenon is common. Schools that are included in the Integrated Islamic School Network in Ponorogo are not few in number. There are six sub-districts that have school institutions that are

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<sup>25</sup> W Akmaliah, "When Ulama Support A Pop Singer: Fatin Sidqiah and Islamic Pop Culture in Post-Suharto Indonesia," *Al-Jami'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies* 52, no. 2 (2014): 351, <https://doi.org/10.14421/ajis.2014.522.351-373>.

<sup>26</sup> Z Makiah et al., "A Convergence in a Religion Commodification and an Expression of Piety in Halal Certification," *Khazanah: Jurnal Studi Islam Dan Humaniora* 20, no. 2 (2022): 153, <https://doi.org/10.18592/khazanah.v20i2.7113>.

<sup>27</sup> M R Zailani and R Ulinnuha, "Komodifikasi Agama Sebagai Identitas Kesalehan Sosial," *Jurnal Riset Agama* 3, no. 1 (2023): 248-265, <https://doi.org/10.15575/jra.v3i1.23519>.

<sup>28</sup> T A Jayana et al., "Wasathiyah Quality Management: A Approach in Islamic Education Quality Management," *Tarbawi: Jurnal Keilmuan Manajemen Pendidikan* 8, no. 01 (2022): 79-88, <https://doi.org/10.32678/tarbawi.v8i01.5821>.

<sup>29</sup> D D Jayanto, "Membaca Fenomena Menguatnya Perayaan 'Islamisasi' Di Indonesia Pasca Reformasi," *Jurnal Kawistara* 10, no. 1 (2020): 101, <https://doi.org/10.22146/kawistara.42579>.

<sup>30</sup> M Wildan and W Witriani, "Popular Piety in Indonesia: 'Aestheticization' and Reproduction of Islam," *Ilahiyat Studies* 12, no. 2 (2021): 213-236, <https://doi.org/10.12730/13091719.2021.122.227>.

included in the Integrated Islamic School Network, namely Ponorogo, Jenangan, Pulung, Bungkal, Balong and Jambon. From these six sub-districts there are more than 20 educational institutions affiliated with JSIT. The following are JSIT-affiliated schools in Ponorogo: MI Pelangi Alam, SDIT Qurrota a'yun, SMPIT Qurrota A'yun, PG-TKIT Qurrota A'yun 2, TK Pelangi Alam, RA Tahfizh Al-Furqon, (Ponorogo), TKIT Robbani Cendekia, SDIT Robbani Cendekia, SMAIT Darut Taqwa, SMPIT Darut Taqwa, PG-TKIT Robbani Cendekia (Jenangan), TKIT Al-Hikmah, SDIT Al-Hikmah (Pulung), PGIT Lentera Hati, SDIT Lentera Hati, TKIT Lentera Hati, Mts Terpadu Al Madinah (Bungkal), MIT Al-Madinah, RA Terpadu Al Madinah, KBIT Al-Madinah (Balong), MI Alam Terpadu Nurussyifa Jambon, TKIT Nurussyifa Krebet (Jambon).

These schools rely on several sources such as monthly student fees, school operational fees provided by the government, charity, donations, grants or others. Philanthropy is one of the financial sources that institutions rely on. Some activities that involve the practice of philanthropy in the Integrated Islamic School Network (JSIT) are land acquisition, school building development, provision of educational infrastructure and so on. The practice of educational philanthropy at SDIT Qurrotaa'yun Ponorogo, for example, is carried out by opening donations to free up land for school development.

Information on educational philanthropy in the form of donations for school development in the Integrated Islamic School Network is usually conveyed by the Foundation that oversees the school in various forms such as invitations to donate to free up land purchases for school development, through broadcasts to whatsapp groups of parents, through invitations to regular meetings of parents and other similar methods. In providing this information either in the form of billboards or whatsapp broadcasts or invitations to regular meetings, usually inserted with verses of the Qur'an or hadith regarding the virtues of giving.

Some parents who regularly make donations feel that what they are doing is a form of piety that will increase and strengthen their faith. One of the parents interviewed said *"donating to the school where their children study makes them feel more religious because they are practising the teachings of Islam regarding almsgiving. When I donate, even though I have to spend money, I feel happy that I can take part in developing the world of Islamic education even though the nominal amount of money I give is not too much. On various occasions during routine student meetings, it is often conveyed that the hand above is better than the hand below. There is also a verse of the Qur'an that explains about giving charity that the goodness we give for jihad in the way of Allah is like grains of rice that will increase many times over because Allah is able to multiply fortune to his sincere servants."*

Another parent who we interviewed with her identity concealed said, *"I regularly donate to SDIT Qurrota A'yun. The nominal amount of donation that I give varies depending on the financial situation of the household. On various occasions the Qurrota A'yun Foundation said that this Educational Institution is a form of jihad and our struggle in the way of Allah SWT. From this statement I was inspired to participate in giving some of my assets for the*

*benefit of school development. When the Qurrota A'yun Foundation opened an open donation for cash waqf for land acquisition and school development, I also bought several metres of land. I intend it as a jariyah charity so that when I die in the grave I will get a reward from the property that I donate. By making this donation, I felt that living in this world should also be thinking about the hereafter. I feel that my days are already spent working and when I participate in the educational philanthropy movement at SDIT Qurrota A'yun, I feel that I have done good socially and spiritually."*

The interview with the parents of the students mentioned above indirectly shows how the school foundation intensely uses Islamic teachings regarding donations, alms, and waqf in the form of commodities that are sold for the benefit of developing the education business. Qurrota A'yun Foundation has various levels of educational institutions as its core business such as SDIT Qurrota A'yun, SMPIT Qurrota A'yun, PG-TKIT Qurrota A'yun, Qurrota A'yun Al-Qur'an Education Institute. The number of students at various levels of education is not a small number. Students at SDIT Qurrota A'yun based on the data we found in the student database at the Ponorogo district Education office are the schools with the third largest number of students in the Ponorogo. The foundation expertly utilises the emotional religious side of the community to develop the core education business it manages.

Various views around Qurrota A'yun Elementary School in Durisawo Ponorogo, for example, have the view that Qurrota A'yun Elementary School is an elite elementary school. Students who attend SDIT Qurrota A'yun are students with middle-class muslims parents. The market segmentation of SDIT Qurrota A'yun is indeed targeting middle-class urban Muslims in Ponorogo. This is reinforced by the scene at SDIT Qurrota A'yun in the morning during inter-school hours and in the afternoon during school pick-up hours which are filled with delivery persons who are dominated by private vehicles in the form of cars, one of the symbols of middle-class muslims economy. Parents who send their children to SDIT Qurrota A'yun have varied occupations, ranging from entrepreneurs and most of them are office employees.

The simple way of understanding religion practised by parents of students at SDIT Qurrota A'yun which is included in the Integrated Islamic School Network (JSIT) in Ponorogo, such as displaying Islamic characteristics by participating in the Education philanthropy Movement, is a form of how religion is transformed into a commodity. This Islamic philanthropy is a form of philanthropy that has long been practised by Islam. It is not a new phenomenon. Islamic philanthropy has a long history dating back nearly 1,400 years, with practices such as zakat, sadaqa, and waqf deeply rooted in Islamic traditions <sup>31</sup>. These forms of philanthropy are considered divinely ordained duties and have played a significant role in Muslim-majority societies <sup>32</sup>. The ultimate goal of Islamic philanthropy is to benefit the economy and

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<sup>31</sup> Ghanea Bassiri, "American Muslim Philanthropy after 9/11."

<sup>32</sup> Ghanea Bassiri.

society, a practice that began during the time of Prophet Muhammad <sup>33</sup>. Islamic philanthropy is not only a religious obligation but also a means of societal welfare and prosperity.

The waqf system has been instrumental in sustaining Islamic religious institutions and organizations <sup>34</sup>. Islamic philanthropy is deeply intertwined with religious teachings, emphasizing principles of compassion and giving <sup>35</sup>. Contemporary events such as 9/11 have influenced the activities of Islamic charities and NGOs, impacting their reception in the West <sup>36</sup>. While some Muslim-majority countries have centralized alms economies, Islamic charity in others unfolds informally <sup>37</sup>. Islamic philanthropy in Indonesia has a rich history deeply intertwined with the country's social, economic, and political landscape. The discourse on Islamic philanthropy has evolved over time, with a focus on understanding its importance across different generations <sup>38</sup>. This evolution has been influenced by various factors, including the rise of Islamic moderation discussions post-1998 reform and the 2002 Bali Bombing incident <sup>39</sup>. There has been a concerted effort to integrate Islamic jurisprudence into the Indonesian legal system, highlighting the role of Islamic law within a non-Islamic state context <sup>40</sup>.

## Conclusion

The rise of the Muslim middle class in Ponorogo reflects a broader Indonesian trend in which religion, politics, and modern lifestyles intersect. This study shows that in the educational context of the Integrated Islamic School Network (JSIT), philanthropic behaviour by parents is not merely financial support but is perceived

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<sup>33</sup> Bt Mahmud, Bazilah Bt Mohd Zain, and Firdaus Bt Fatah Yasin, "Participation of Muslim Women in Islamic Philanthropy in Digital Era: Malaysian Experience."

<sup>34</sup> S Busari, "Emerging Social Waqf Model for the Welfare of Pandemic Orphans," *IJUM Journal of Religion and Civilisational Studies* 6, no. 2 (2024): 139–158, <https://doi.org/10.31436/ijrcs.v6i2.296>.

<sup>35</sup> R A Opoku, "Examining the Motivational Factors behind Charitable Giving among Young People in a Prominent Islamic Country," *International Journal of Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Marketing* 18, no. 3 (2013): 172–186, <https://doi.org/10.1002/nvsm.1457>.

<sup>36</sup> Fallas, "Charity and Philanthropy in Middle East History."

<sup>37</sup> A Mittermaier, "Islamic Charity as (Non)Political in Contemporary Egypt," *Islamic Law and Society* 27, no. 1–2 (2020): 111–131, <https://doi.org/10.1163/15685195-02712P05>.

<sup>38</sup> E T Susdarwono and S.Thoriquil Huda, "Perceptions of the Importance of Philanthropy According to the Classification of Generations Based on Beresford Research," *Review of Islamic Social Finance and Entrepreneurship* 2, no. 2 (2023): 133–145, <https://doi.org/10.20885/RISFE.vol2.iss2.art3>.

<sup>39</sup> A Kasdi, U Farida, and C Mahfud, "Islamic Studies and Local Wisdom at PTKIN in Central Java: Opportunities, Challenges, and Prospects of Pioneering Religious Moderation in Indonesia," *HIKMATUNA: Journal for Integrative Islamic Studies* 6, no. 1 (2020): 51–62, <https://doi.org/10.28918/hikmatuna.v6i1.2618>.

<sup>40</sup> Alfitri, "Expanding a Formal Role for Islamic Law in the Indonesian Legal System: The Case of Mu'Amalat," *Journal of Law and Religion* 23, no. 1 (2007): 249–270, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0748081400002666>.

as an act of *ibadah* (worship) and a way to live a kaffah Islamic life. Field interviews and observations reveal that teachers and administrators—many affiliated with the *tarbiyah* movement and the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS)—frame school fundraising as a religiously meaningful commitment. This framing transforms essential Islamic values into persuasive commodities, appealing to parents' emotional and spiritual motivations and fostering a strong sense of belonging to a collective religious mission. In this process, philanthropy becomes both a reflection of personal piety and a means of reinforcing middle-class Islamic identity through the accumulation of symbolic religious prestige.

Theoretically, the findings contribute to Bourdieu's cultural and social reproduction framework by illustrating how *habitus*, *cultural capital*, and *symbolic capital* operate within a faith-based educational arena. Philanthropy in JSIT schools emerges as a key site where economic resources are converted into religious legitimacy and social distinction. Practically, this underscores the need for greater transparency and accountability in managing school-based philanthropy, ensuring that religious narratives inspire rather than pressure participation. For policymakers and educators, the challenge lies in preserving the sincerity of religious giving while safeguarding parents from undue influence. Future research could compare JSIT philanthropic practices with those in other Islamic and non-Islamic institutions to determine whether these patterns are unique to *tarbiyah*-influenced networks or part of a wider trend. Reflection is especially needed among school leaders and community figures to ensure that the integration of religious devotion and institutional goals maintains ethical integrity and does not compromise the authenticity of faith-based practices.

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