

Religious Authority within the Colonial Structure: The Kiai Penghulu of Banyumas and Local Social Dynamics (1922–1938)

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ABSTRACT

The early twentieth century marked a crucial period in the transformation of the roles of *kiai penghulu* in Banyumas, particularly within the socio-religious and socio-cultural domains. Their integration into the colonial bureaucratic structure positioned *kiai penghulu* in a strategic role that enabled them to perform dual functions: as religious officials and as social actors mediating between colonial administrative interests and the religious needs of Muslim communities. In this context, *kiai penghulu* were not merely executors of normative religious duties but were also actively engaged in local processes of social change. This article examines the roles of *kiai penghulu* in Banyumas amid the evolving social dynamics shaped by the implementation of the Ethical Policy and the intensification of modernization in the Netherlands Indies. The study employs the historical method, encompassing heuristics, source criticism, interpretation, and historiography. The findings demonstrate that *kiai penghulu* in Banyumas played an active role in early twentieth-century social life through their involvement in religious organizations such as Muhammadiyah during the 1920s, participation in the establishment of grassroots financial institutions that later developed into *Bank Rakyat Indonesia*, and contributions to the dissemination of knowledge through writings published in *Majalah Damai*. This article contributes to the study of colonial Islamic socio-cultural history by highlighting local perspectives that position *kiai penghulu* as active agents of social change and by offering a fresh understanding of religious officials as mediators between the colonial state and Muslim society.

ABSTRAK

Awal abad ke-20 menandai periode penting dalam transformasi peran *kiai penghulu* di Banyumas, khususnya dalam ranah sosial-keagamaan dan sosial-kultural. Integrasi mereka ke dalam struktur birokrasi kolonial menempatkan *kiai penghulu* pada posisi strategis yang memungkinkan mereka menjalankan fungsi ganda: sebagai pejabat agama sekaligus aktor sosial yang menjembatani kepentingan administrasi kolonial dengan kebutuhan keagamaan masyarakat Muslim. Dalam konteks ini, *kiai penghulu* tidak hanya berperan sebagai pelaksana tugas-tugas keagamaan normatif, tetapi juga terlibat aktif dalam proses perubahan sosial di tingkat lokal. Artikel ini mengkaji peran *kiai penghulu* di Banyumas di tengah dinamika sosial yang berkembang seiring penerapan Politik Etis dan menguatnya arus modernisasi di Hindia Belanda. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode sejarah yang meliputi heuristik, kritik sumber, interpretasi, dan historiografi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa *kiai penghulu* di Banyumas berperan aktif dalam kehidupan sosial pada awal abad ke-20 melalui keterlibatan mereka dalam organisasi keagamaan Muhammadiyah, partisipasi dalam pendirian lembaga keuangan rakyat yang berkembang menjadi Bank Rakyat Indonesia, serta kontribusi dalam penyebaran pengetahuan melalui tulisan-tulisan yang dimuat dalam *Majalah Damai*. Artikel ini berkontribusi pada kajian sejarah sosial-kultural Islam kolonial dari perspektif lokal yang menempatkan *kiai penghulu* sebagai agen aktif perubahan sosial, sekaligus menawarkan pemahaman baru mengenai pejabat agama sebagai mediator antara negara kolonial dan masyarakat Muslim.

Keywords

Kiai Penghulu, colonial Islam, ethical policy, social change

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Introduction

In Indonesian colonial historiography, studies on Islam and socio-religious dynamics have generally placed greater emphasis on mass organizations, national figures, and ideological discourses that emerged in urban centers (Noer, 1996; Alfian, 2010; Anam, 2010; Muspawi, 2018; Rohmana, 2025). Such an approach, although important, often leaves a significant gap in understanding the role of local religious actors who operated at administrative and social levels more closely connected to the broader community. One such overlooked figure is the *kiai penghulu*, a religious official who occupied a strategic position both within the colonial governmental structure and within the religious life of the Muslim community (Hisyam, 2001; Ismail, 1997).

The *kiai penghulu* did not merely function as an executor of Islamic legal affairs, such as marriage, divorce, and inheritance, but also acted as an authoritative figure wielding considerable social and symbolic influence within the community. Positioned at the intersection between the colonial state and the Muslim community, the *kiai penghulu* assumed a dual role: as a component of the colonial bureaucracy and, simultaneously, as a local religious leader. This ambivalent position generated complex dynamics, particularly in responding to social change, colonial regulations concerning Islam, and the evolving religious consciousness of society in the early twentieth century (Ismail, 1997).

In Banyumas, these dynamics became increasingly pronounced during the period 1922–1938, a phase marked by the intensification of colonial regulation over religious life, the expansion of Islamic educational institutions, and the strengthening of interactions among *ulama*, society, and local governmental structures. Within this context, the *kiai penghulu* of Banyumas cannot be understood merely as a colonial administrative functionary, but rather as a social actor actively engaged in negotiating between the interests of the colonial state and the socio-religious aspirations of the local Muslim community. Nevertheless, scholarly studies that specifically examine the role of the *kiai penghulu* within the local social context of colonial Banyumas remain highly limited. Most existing research tends to emphasize normative and institutional aspects, such as colonial religious regulations or the structure of Islamic courts, without positioning the *kiai penghulu* as a historical subject endowed with agency. Consequently, our understanding of socio-religious dynamics at the local level remains incomplete.

Building upon these considerations, this article aims to critically examine the role and position of the *kiai penghulu* of Banyumas within the broader social dynamics of the colonial period, with particular focus on the years 1922–1938. The year 1922 was chosen as the starting point for this article because it was in this year that the Banyumas penghulu was recorded in a local colonial-era newspaper as being actively involved in the establishment of the Islamic organisation Muhammadiyah, whilst the year 1938 was chosen as the end point because in that year the Banyumas village head was active in disseminating knowledge (public education) in the official periodical of the *Perhimpunan Penghulu dan Pegawainya* (PPDP), *Damai* magazine. By positioning the *kiai penghulu* as historical actors endowed with agency, this study seeks to

illuminate the ways in which they navigated and responded to colonial policies, negotiated their authority within local society, and actively contributed to the formation and transformation of Banyumas's socio-religious landscape under colonial rule.

Studies on the religious elite (*kiai*) in Banyumas have generally focused on what Karel A. Steenbrink categorizes as *kiai tarekat*, *kiai kitab*, and *kiai jimat* (Steenbrink, 1984). Research on *kiai tarekat*, for instance, can be found in the works of Setiawan, Sobirin, and Nasrudin. Setiawan's study examines the biography and intellectual networks of Syekh Nahrawi al-Banyumasi, highlighting, among other aspects, the network of the Syadziliyah order. He is identified as a significant link in the transmission of the Syadziliyah *silsilah* (spiritual chain) in Indonesia through his disciples (Setiawan, 2023). One such line of transmission from Syekh Nahrawi al-Banyumasi runs through Kiai Jazuli of Pliken, whose biography is discussed by Sobirin. (Sobirin, 2021) Meanwhile, Nasrudin focuses on Kiai Muhammad Ilyas, a *mursyid* of the Naqshabandiyah-Khalidiyah order in Sokaraja, Banyumas (Nasrudin, 2021).

Studies on *kiai kitab* may refer to several works, including those by Ridwan et al. and Saefudin. The work of Ridwan et al. maps the network of *ulama* in the Banyumas Residency, encompassing the interconnected circles of *kiai kitab* and *kiai pesantren*. It explains that at the turn of the nineteenth to the twentieth century, a number of pesantren emerged sporadically across the region, such as Pesantren Bogangin in Sumpiuh, Pesantren Kesugihan in Cilacap, Pesantren Al-Suniyah in Kebonkapol, Sokaraja, and Pesantren Leler in Kebasen, Banyumas (Ridwan et al., 2026). Meanwhile, Saefudin's work primarily compiles brief biographical sketches of forty prominent religious figures (*ulama*) in Banyumas who exercised considerable influence within the region (Saefudin, 2020).

Studies on *kiai jimat* may refer to the works of Sukardi and Karel A. Steenbrink. Both writings examine the figure of Kiai Nurhakim, the initiator of the Akmaliah *tarekat* in Banyumas. Kiai Nurhakim was believed to have sold amulets (*jimat*) to his followers at varying prices, ranging from f.3 to f.100 (Steenbrink, 1984; Sukardi, 2008).

Meanwhile, studies specifically addressing the *kiai penghulu* in Banyumas remain scarce. More broadly, however, discussions of the *kiai penghulu* in Java can be found in several works, such as those by L.W.C. van den Berg Pijper, Muhammad Hisyam, Ismail Fajrie Alatas, and Karel A. Steenbrink. Collectively, these works address the *kiai penghulu* in Java in general terms, examining their structure, functions, and position within the socio-religious context of colonial Javanese society. Only a limited number of studies briefly mention the role of Banyumas *kiai*, such as in the work of Ismail, and even then only in passing (Hisyam, 2001; Ismail, 1997; Pijper, 1985; Steenbrink, 1984). In addition to the general study of penghulus carried out by the three authors mentioned above, there are also studies on local penghulus in various regions of Indonesia, such as the work by Gusmian (2018), who photographed the penghulu KHR. Muhammad Adnan (1889–1969 AD) in Surakarta, Kusnaldi dan Aulia (2018), which examined the village head, R.H. Achmad Djoewaeni, in Sukabumi, and Rohman (2019), which examines the biography of K.H. Sangidu, a religious leader in Yogyakarta who

proposed the name 'Muhammadiyah' for the organisation founded by K.H. Ahmad Dahlan in 1912. Therefore, no study has yet been found that specifically examines the role and activities of the *kiai penghulu* of Banyumas, particularly during the colonial period, especially in relation to the social sphere, which has largely escaped scholarly attention. This article thus seeks to fill that lacuna.

This article aims to analyze the role and position of the *kiai penghulu* of Banyumas within the socio-cultural dynamics of the Muslim community during the Dutch East Indies colonial period, particularly between 1922 and 1938. This study positions the *kiai penghulu* as local actors who not only carried out administrative-religious functions but were also actively involved in shaping social practices, articulating Islamic cultural values, and structuring patterns of relations between *ulama* and society. Employing a socio-cultural historical approach, the article explores how the *kiai penghulu* responded to colonial policies, managed religious authority, and negotiated Islamic traditions within the context of social transformation at the local level. Positioning the penghulu as a holder of religious authority in Indonesia serves to reinforce Feener's finding that, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, religious authority was no longer monopolised by traditionalist ulama, but was also held by a new religious elite, such as modernist ulama, journalists and, of course, *kiai penghulu* (Feener, 2014).

The contribution of this article lies in enriching the historiography of Islam in the colonial period by foregrounding a socio-cultural perspective that has thus far received limited scholarly attention. It offers a more contextualized reading of the *kiai penghulu* as cultural mediators operating between the colonial structure and the Muslim community. In doing so, this study broadens our understanding of local Islamic cultural dynamics and deepens the analysis of the interplay between religion, power, and society within the context of colonial Indonesia.

Method

This article is grounded in historical research. Within the framework of the historical method, the study follows four principal stages: source collection (*heuristics*), source verification or criticism, interpretation, and historical writing (*historiography*). Referring to the methodological formulation proposed by Kuntowijoyo, this process may be expanded into five stages by incorporating the selection of the research topic as an initial step (Kuntowijoyo, 2003, 2013)

The examination of the position and activities of the *kiai penghulu* in Banyumas during the colonial period is conducted through the utilization of both primary and secondary sources. The primary sources consulted include the Banyumas Colonial Period Archives preserved at the *Arsip Nasional Republik Indonesia* (ANRI) in Jakarta, a book entitled *Laporan-Laporan Tentang Gerakan Protes di Jawa Pada Abad XX*, published by ANRI, as well as colonial-era periodicals, notably *Perasaan* (Sokaraja, 1919-1920), *Damai* (Surakarta, 1938) and *De Expres* (1914). These publications provide both contextual information and empirical data relevant to reconstructing the socio-religious role of the *kiai penghulu* in the colonial era.

This study relies on secondary sources in the form of scholarly works that specifically address, or are closely related to, the study of the *kiai penghulu*. Among them are the works of Pijper, which provide a conceptual framework for understanding religious officials in the colonial period (Pijper, 1985) Muhammad Hisyam, who examines the dynamics of religious authority (Hisyam, 2001) and Ismail whose study highlights the relationship between colonial bureaucratic structures and religious leadership (Ismail, 1997). Concerning sources specific to the Banyumas context, this article also draws upon local historical works held in the Banyumas Regional Library, such as *Inti Silsilah dan Sedjarah Banyumas* (Brotodiredjo & Darmosuwondo, n.d.) and *Riwayat Banyumas* (Riwayat Banyumas, n.d.) The combination of critical analysis of primary sources and engagement with previous scholarship (secondary sources) is expected to produce a more comprehensive and objective historical reconstruction of the social role of the *kiai penghulu* of Banyumas during the colonial era.

In addition, before being incorporated into a historical narrative that prioritises a chronological sequence, this article naturally undergoes a process of analysis. In its analysis, this article draws on Ismail Fajrie Alatas's theory of religious authority. According to Alatas, religious authority is the recognition of an individual's or group's connection to the prophetic (foundational) past, which is based on hierarchical relationships, thereby enabling them to articulate the Prophet's teachings to the community without resorting to coercion. This connection can be established through various means, such as lineage, scholarly lineage, spiritual experiences (*ru'ya*), or mastery of religious texts, including hadiths (Alatas, 2024). From this perspective, the *penghulu* can be understood as a holder of religious authority, as their legitimacy stems not solely from an administrative position conferred by the state, but also from their mastery of religious knowledge, their connection to the scholarly tradition of Islam, and the community's recognition of their capacity to provide guidance, adjudicate matters of Islamic family law, and convey religious teachings. Thus, the authority of the *penghulu* is a combination of formal legitimacy and religious legitimacy that is socially recognised.

Result and Discussion

The *Kiai Penghulu* of Banyumas in the Early Twentieth Century

During the colonial period, *kiai* in Java were broadly divided into two principal groups: independent *kiai* and official *kiai* appointed by the colonial government. According to the typology proposed by Karel A. Steenbrink, independent *kiai* comprised five categories: *kiai* who taught the Qur'an (*kiai ngajar Qur'an*), *kiai kitab*, *kiai tarekat*, *kiai jimat*, and itinerant *kiai*. Official *kiai*, by contrast, referred to the *kiai penghulu*, who held formal positions within the colonial administrative structure (Steenbrink, 1984). Thus, there were six categories of *kiai*, although in practice a single individual could embody more than one role simultaneously.

In colonial Banyumas, based on the author's research to date, four principal categories of *kiai* can be identified: *kiai tarekat*, *kiai kitab*, *kiai jimat*, and official *kiai*. The *kiai tarekat* were particularly prominent through figures such as Syekh Nahrawi al-Banyumasi, a scholar from Purbalingga who resided in Mecca and received the *sanad*

(spiritual chain of transmission) of the Syadziliyah order from Syeikh Muhammad Shaleh al-Zawawi al-Makki. This lineage was subsequently transmitted to his disciples, including Kiai Ibrahim Murmaredja, Kiai Abdul Malik Mersi, and Kiai Hasan Jazuli (Setiawan, 2023; Sobirin, 2021). In addition, the Naqshbandiyah-Khalidiyah order developed in Banyumas through figures such as Kiai Muhammad Ilyas of Sokaraja and Kiai Muhammad Habib of Kebarongan, both of whom played significant roles in consolidating and transmitting the teachings of the order within the region (Misbah, 2019; Ridwan et al., 2024).

Kiai kitab, or *kiai pesantren*, played a central role in the teaching of the *kitab kuning* (classical Islamic texts) and in the transmission of classical Islamic education. These kiai devoted their daily efforts and time to educating santri in their pesantren through the study of the *kitab kuning*, employing instructional methods such as *bandongan* (collective lecture-style teaching) and *sorogan* (individualized reading and correction) (Dhofier, 2011). At the turn of the nineteenth to the twentieth century, several pesantren were established in Banyumas under the leadership of kiai renowned for their scholarly authority, including Kiai Abdullah Suyuti of Bogangin, Kiai Badawi Hanafi of Kesugihan, and Kiai Zuhdi of Leler (Ridwan et al., 2024). Some *kiai kitab* also conducted teaching activities beyond the pesantren setting, extending their instruction to broader segments of society, such as Kiai Ahmad Syatibi (Zuhri, 2001).

Kiai jimat were primarily associated with the practice of esoteric knowledge and the use of amulets (*azimat*). The most prominent figure in this category was Kiai Nurhakim, a specialist in amulets and incantations (*jampe*) who had reportedly studied in Cirebon, Bogor, and Banten (Steenbrink, 1984; Sukardi, 2008). Another notable figure was Kiai Sirad, also known as Kiai Goemeng, based in Brangkal, who led a circle of disciples known as the *Santana* association. In addition to Kiai Sirad, this association was also headed by his son-in-law, Mashadi. Beyond their leadership role, they were likewise known for selling amulets among their followers ("Murid Sirad Alias Bala Santana," 1920). The Sentana association advanced interpretations that diverged from mainstream Islamic teachings, particularly concerning the pillars of faith (*rukun iman*) and the pillars of Islam (*rukun Islam*). As a consequence, the group encountered opposition from orthodox *kiai* in Banyumas, including those based in Bogangin and Sokaraja, as well as from *kiai* in Somalangu (Kebumen), who regarded its teachings as doctrinally problematic ("Tjerita Morit Sentana," 1920). According to official reports, the leader of the Sentana association, Mashadi, was eventually imprisoned in Banyumas (ANRI, 1981, pp. 164–170; "Perhimpoean Santana," 1920).

The final category of *kiai* identified in Banyumas is that of official *kiai*, namely those formally recognized and incorporated into the framework of the colonial state bureaucracy. This category refers to the *kiai penghulu*. Such figures constituted authoritative religious officials who held a formal mandate within the governmental administrative structure, particularly in the domain of Islamic law (*al-tasyri' wa al-qadā'*), encompassing matters of religious legislation and adjudication (Ismail, 1997). Before colonial intervention, the office of *penghulu* had already been integrated into local structures of authority, such as those of the *raja* or *bupati*, who bore responsibility for the administration and management of religious affairs. During the early phase of islamization in Banyumas, figures such as Syeikh Maqdam Wali, Syaikh

Abdus Shamad, Pangeran Jambukarang, Syaikh Atas Angin, and Ki Ageng Gumelem are believed to have exercised roles and functions analogous to those of the *penghulu* (Priyadi, 2019; D. Burhanudin & et.al, 2022).

Historically, systematic records concerning the *penghulu* of Banyumas remain unclear until the second half of the nineteenth century, particularly after the region came under colonial authority following the Java War (1825–1830). Banyumas was formally incorporated into the colonial administration on 22 June 1830, accompanied by the payment of financial compensation amounting to f.90,000 to the former rulers. Of this sum, f.80,000 was allocated to the Kasunanan Surakarta and f.10,000 to the Kasultanan Yogyakarta (Houben, 2017, pp. 99–100; Sukardi, 2014, p. 2). Under colonial administration, Banyumas and its surrounding areas were incorporated into a residency (*karesidenan*) comprising five regencies: Banyumas, Purbalingga, Banjarnegara, Cilacap, and Purwokerto, with the administrative capital located in the town of Banyumas (Sukardi, 2014, p. 2). With the incorporation of Banyumas into the colonial administrative system, all matters about the region came under the scrutiny of colonial records, including the institutional structure of the *kiai penghulu*.

In 1871, colonial records document the structure of the *penghulu* within the Banyumas Residency. The hierarchy consisted of one *Hofdpenghulu* overseeing the entire residency, five *Regentschap Penghulu* (each assigned to a regency), and some *District Penghulu* corresponding to the districts within each regency. Beneath them were officials such as the *Naib Penghulu*, *Carik Penghulu*, *Ketib*, *Lebe* (or *Kayim*), *Modin*, and *Merbot*. For example, Banyumas had three *District Penghulu*, Purwokerto two, Purbalingga three, Banjarnegara three, and Cilacap five. For a more detailed overview, see Table 1 below.

Table 1.
The Number of *Penghulu* at Each Administrative Level in the Banyumas Residency, 1872

Administrative Level	Banyumas	Purwokerto	Purbalingga	Banjarnegara	Cilacap	Total
<i>Hofd Penghulu</i>	1	-	-	-	-	1
<i>Regentschap Penghulu</i>	1	1	1	1	1	5
<i>District Penghulu</i>	3	2	3	3	5	16
<i>Naib Penghulu</i>	-	-	-	-	1	1
<i>Carik Penghulu</i>	4	3	1	2	3	13
<i>Ketib</i>	36	34	24	32	43	169
<i>Lebe/Kayim</i>	272	243	435	307	265	1522
<i>Modin</i>	16	10	21	8	25	80
<i>Merbot</i>	12	12	18	3	9	54

(Source: *Banjoemas 1872*, 1872)

At the turn of the nineteenth to the twentieth century, personal records of the *penghulu* became increasingly well documented. In Banyumas, the recorded officeholders include H. Ismail (1878–1884), Assan Besari, who served as *Hofdpenghulu* (1884–1923), Mas Moh. Tapsir, and R.H. Kalihusna (1923–?); in Cilacap, Mas Kali Ibrahim (1854–1908), Mas Moh. Kalipah (1908–1915), and Mas Moh. Suhemi (1915–?); in Purwokerto, Mas Rejo Mohamad (1854–1889), Mas Rejo Supono (1889–1890), Mas Moh. Supono (1890–1926), and R. Moh. Dirdjo (1925–?); in Purbalingga, Mas Ardjo Mohamad (1873–1904), H. Abu Ngamar (1904–?), Ahmad Sarbini, and Sayid Moh. Umar; and in Banjarnegara, Mas Assan Mukmin (1878–1910) followed by Mas H. Moh. Nur (1910–?) (Hisyam, 2001; Ismail, 1997).

Entering the twentieth century, the Dutch East Indies entered a new phase of colonial policy known as the Ethical Policy, which succeeded the Cultivation System (1830–1870) and the Liberal period (1870–1900) (Steenbrink, 2017, p. 154). This policy was presented as an effort to improve the conditions of the colonized population through programs of irrigation, education, and emigration. In practice, however, the Ethical Policy did not alter the fundamental character of colonialism, which remained oriented toward the interests of the metropole. These programs were primarily designed to support colonial political and economic objectives, particularly the expansion of plantation enterprises and the provision of a cheap labor force (Kartodirdjo, 2018, p. 39). Despite its limitations and inherent contradictions, the Ethical Policy nevertheless held significant historical importance for the development of society in the Dutch East Indies (Ricklefs, 2005, p. 319).

One of the most significant consequences of this period was the opening of social space for the growth of collective consciousness and modern forms of organization. The early twentieth century witnessed the emergence of various political and religious organizations, such as Budi Utomo (1908), Sarekat Islam (1912), Muhammadiyah (1912), and Nahdlatul Ulama (1926) (Noer, 1996). On the other hand, professional associations and labor unions (*vakbond*) also emerged during this period, one of which was the *Perhimpunan Penghulu dan Pegawainya* (PPDP), established in 1937 (Hisyam, 2001, p. 200). Alongside the growth of these organizations, the press became a strategic medium for articulating aspirations and constructing ideological networks. Various organizations established their own publications, such as *Darmo Kondo* (1910), affiliated with *Budi Utomo*, and *Oetoesan Hindia*, associated with Sarekat Islam (Surjomihardjo & dkk., 2002, p. hlm. 85). Other notable publications included *Swara Muhammadiyah* (1915), issued by Muhammadiyah (Tabroni, 2024, p. 30), *Swara Nahdlatul Ulama* (1927), published by Nahdlatul Ulama (Anam, 2010, p. 92), and the magazine *Damai* (1938), which represented the voice of the *Perhimpunan Penghulu dan Pegawainya* (PPDP) (Hoofdbestuur P.P.D.P., 1938). Together, these examples illustrate how organizations and the press functioned as closely interconnected forces within the dynamics of Indonesia's early twentieth-century nationalist movement.

The surge of nationalist movements in the early twentieth century also extended to the Banyumas region. The Banyumas Residency, comprising five regencies—Purbalingga, Cilacap, Banjarnegara, Purwokerto, and Banyumas—witnessed the emergence of nationalist activism. It is recorded that Sarekat Islam had established its presence in Banjarnegara as early as 1913 (“De Expres,” 1914). the Purwokerto branch

of Muhammadiyah was officially established in 1922 (Suwarno & Kosasih, 2013, p. 37), while the *Perhimpunan Penghulu dan Pegawainya* (PPDP) became active in the Banyumas Residency in 1937, specifically in the regency of Purbalingga (“Persiapan-Persiapan Tjabang-Tjabang PPDP Jang Soedah Berdiri Dan Telah Tertjatat , Jang Soedah Dan Beloem Dapat Diadakan Installatie Pengsahan Dengan Officieel,” 1938) Following its establishment in Purbalingga, the *Perhimpunan Penghulu dan Pegawainya* (PPDP) officially opened a branch in Purwokerto on 17 January 1938 (“Berita Opisil PPDP Dari Badan Secretariaat P.B. Harian,” 1938b), and in Cilacap on 7 May 1938 (“Berita Opisil PPDP Dari Badan Secretariaat P.B. Harian,” 1938c).

The presence of the *Perhimpunan Penghulu dan Pegawainya* (PPDP) in the Banyumas region since 1937 provides an indication of the number of *penghulu* in the area, at least in the three regencies where PPDP branches were established. Records show that Purbalingga had 69 *penghulu*; Purwokerto registered 71 *penghulu*, consisting of 69 regular members and 2 extraordinary members; and Cilacap had 124 *penghulu* (“Berita Opisil PPDP Dari Badan Secretariaat P.B. Harian,” 1938a).

The Role of the *Kiai Penghulu* of Banyumas in the Social and Cultural Sphere, 1922–1938

Having examined the position of the *kiai penghulu* in Banyumas in relation to other religious elites, as well as their place within a broader historical trajectory, this section elaborates on their roles in the social sphere. It focuses on three principal areas: the involvement of the *kiai penghulu* of Banyumas in Islamic (socio-religious) organizations, their participation in the establishment of the *Bank Priyayi* (socio-economic domain), and their engagement with the magazine *Damai* (socio-cultural sphere). These three dimensions of the *kiai penghulu*’s activities in Banyumas are discussed in the following paragraphs.

a. The *Kiai Penghulu* and Islamic Organizations in Banyumas

The early twentieth century constituted one of the most pivotal periods in Indonesian history, as during this era virtually all segments of society in the Dutch East Indies engaged in various forms of mobilization. These movements manifested in diverse ways, including the establishment of newspapers and journals, public meetings and congresses, labor unions and strikes, as well as the formation of political parties and social organizations. Such activities were inseparable from the broader efforts of the indigenous population (*bumiputra*) to articulate and express their newly emerging political consciousness, to mobilize ideas and intellectual currents, and to confront the socio-political realities of the Indies within the global and historical context they experienced (Shiraishi, 1997).

Within this atmosphere of mobilization, particularly in the Islamic context, several organizations emerged during the early twentieth century, one of which was Muhammadiyah, founded on 18 November 1912 in Yogyakarta. According to Deliar Noer, the association was established by Ahmad Dahlan at the encouragement of his students and several members of Budi Utomo. In its initial phase of development, Ahmad Dahlan concentrated on disseminating the organization’s ideas primarily

within Yogyakarta. It was only after 1917 that the operational scope of the association began to expand beyond the region (Noer, 1996, pp. 84-87).

According to Alfian, during its formative period (1912-1923), Muhammadiyah focused on developing activities that supported the organisation's development. These activities include *Tabligh/Dakwah* (the propagation of Islam), Education, *Aisyiah*, Helper in the Suffering of the Faithful/*Penolong Kesengsaraan Umat* (PKU), *Kepanduan (Hizb al-Wathan)*, *Taman Pustaka* (Publishing and Libraries), *Bahagian Penolong Haji*, as well as a few other minor activities as well as a few other minor activities. Of all the activities mentioned above, it is the *Tabligh* activities that have been most successfully carried out by Muhammadiyah. Several factors underpin the success of these *Tabligh* activities: firstly, Muhammadiyah has many *Tabligh* preachers, including both *kiai* and *haji*, who are highly dedicated. Secondly, these *tabligh* activities are relatively easy to organise. Thirdly, *tabligh* activities require relatively little funding compared to other activities. These da'wah activities gained increasing momentum in spreading the ideals of Muhammadiyah in the 1920s, when the Dutch East Indies colonial government granted Muhammadiyah permission to operate more widely, having previously been restricted to the Yogyakarta region alone. Consequently, in the early 1920s, we find that Muhammadiyah's *muballigh* (preachers) began undertaking missionary tours to various cities across Java, such as Batavia, Garut, Surakarta, Pekalongan, Pekajangan, Banyuwangi, and, of course, Purwokerto (Banyumas Residency) (Alfian, 2010, pp. 184-186).

It should be noted that Muhammadiyah's outreach utilised the network infrastructure inherent to its founder, namely the network of batik traders and *penghulu*. Before founding Muhammadiyah, Ahmad Dahlan was a batik entrepreneur with an extensive network of fellow batik entrepreneurs in other cities. In addition to being a batik entrepreneur, Ahmad Dahlan was also a *kiai penghulu* at the Yogyakarta Palace; his position as a religious official enabled him to spread the ideas of Muhammadiyah's reform movement amongst *penghulus* in other cities, who typically resided in *Kauman*, just as Ahmad Dahlan himself did. Ahmad Dahlan made good use of these two networks, with the result that almost the entire *Kauman* community in Java became early members and supporters of the Muhammadiyah Movement. At this point, we can see that Muhammadiyah's members were urban communities in Java, whose numbers were growing (Hisyam, 2001, pp. 165-168).

The framework for Muhammadiyah's *tabligh* activities described above, in particular, the network of *penghulus*, can also be found in Purwokerto, Banyumas. In Purwokerto, the preacher who came in person was the founder of Muhammadiyah himself, Ahmad Dahlan. It is recorded that in 1920 Ahmad Dahlan delivered a *tabligh* in Purwokerto. The event was welcomed by numerous Islamic figures in the region, including members of the *kiai penghulu* circle. The *Hofdpenghulu* of Purwokerto, R. Moehammad Dirdjo, gave his approval for the gathering to proceed. Another *kiai penghulu* who showed particular enthusiasm for the event was Kiai Chalimi. Following the *tabligh*, Ahmad Dahlan and several local Islamic leaders held a further consultation at Kiai Chalimi's residence, located behind the *pendopo*. On that occasion, Ahmad Dahlan outlined the foundational principles of

Muhammadiyah and expressed his commitment to return to Purwokerto the following year (Suwarno & Kosasih, 2013, p. 34).

In 1921, Ahmad Dahlan returned to Purwokerto to conduct another *tabligh*. On this second occasion, he and several local Islamic leaders organized the administrative structure of the Muhammadiyah association in Purwokerto. With Ahmad Dahlan present, the branch leadership was successfully formed and immediately endorsed by him. Nevertheless, formal recognition followed only a year later, with the issuance of Decree No. 11/BM dated 15 November 1922, through which Ahmad Dahlan, as President of Muhammadiyah, officially ratified the establishment of the Muhammadiyah branch in Purwokerto (Suwarno & Kosasih, 2013, p. 37).

Although the *kiai penghulu* did not assume the position of daily chairman of the Muhammadiyah branch in Purwokerto, a significant role in this context was played by Kiai Chalimi. As the *penghulu* of Purwokerto, he made an important contribution to the early formation of Muhammadiyah, particularly when his residence served as the venue for crucial discussions regarding its establishment in 1920. Following the formal creation of the branch, Kiai Chalimi became a member of the *Majelis Tarjih* of Muhammadiyah Purwokerto, in recognition of his profound knowledge of Islamic scholarship. Following the establishment of Muhammadiyah in Purwokerto, these leading religious scholars became the driving force behind Muhammadiyah activities in the region, including the establishment of langars for Islamic teachings, an organisational coordination centre, charitable enterprises (*amal usaha*), and the expansion of membership across Purwokerto and the surrounding areas (Suwarno & Kosasih, 2013, pp. 40–42).

b. The Kiai Penghulu of Banyumas and the Establishment of the Bank Priyayi

As will be discussed in the following section, one of the principal duties of the *penghulu* was the administration of the mosque, which gave rise to the designation *penghulu masjid* or mosque imam. In carrying out these responsibilities, the mosque *penghulu* was assisted by forty officials occupying various ranks and positions. These included the imam, *khatib*, *mu'azzin*, *marbot*, clerk, *syuhud* (witnesses), and custodian (*juru kunci*). The number forty corresponds to the minimum quorum required for the validity of the Friday congregational prayer according to the Shafi'i school of Islamic jurisprudence.

In addition to serving as imam for the five daily congregational prayers, the *penghulu* was also responsible for managing mosque finances, commonly referred to as the *khas masjid*, as well as overseeing religious study circles and the celebration of Islamic holy days that had become deeply rooted in Javanese tradition. The funds supporting these activities were derived from various sources, including marriage fees, *waqf* endowments, *zakat*, almsgiving (*sedekah*), and voluntary contributions (*infak*) from the Muslim community. This arrangement enabled mosques in Java to accumulate considerable financial resources. The *khas masjid* funds were subsequently allocated for the physical maintenance of the mosque, assistance to traveling scholars who had exhausted their provisions, and other related purposes.

At the Purwokerto Mosque, the *kiai penghulu* did not merely allocate the *khas masjid* funds for routine religious and social purposes, but also directed them toward community economic empowerment by using them as initial capital for establishing a rural credit bank. Records indicate that in 1895, the accumulated mosque treasury at Purwokerto had reached a substantial amount. Upon the initiative of Raden Wiriatmaja, Raden Atma Soepardja, and Raden Djaya Soemitra, in collaboration with the chief *penghulu* Redja Moehammad, who also served as religious judge of Purwokerto, a sum of f 4000 from the mosque treasury was utilized as capital to found the Bank Penolong dan Tabungan bagi Priyayi di Purwokerto. This institution later became known as the *Bank Priyayi Purwokerto (De Poerwokertosche Hulp-en Spaarbank der Inlandsche Hoofden)* and was officially established on 16 December 1895 (Ismail, 1997, p. 73). The establishment of this bank soon attracted considerable interest from other regions, including Demak, Magelang, Kudus, and Tasikmalaya, whose representatives came to Purwokerto to study its bookkeeping system and methods of financial management. During their training in banking administration, these delegates were accommodated at the *pendopo* of the *kepatihan*, where they stayed while learning the procedures of accounting and institutional organization applied by the *Bank Priyayi Purwokerto (Riwayat Banyumas, n.d., pp. 120-121)*

The establishment of the *Bank Priyayi Purwokerto* was closely linked to the widespread indebtedness among priyayi in Purwokerto. This condition frequently arose after they hosted lavish ceremonial feasts that required substantial expenditures. Consequently, to cover these expenses, many priyayi resorted to borrowing money from private moneylenders, a practice that ultimately drove them into deeper financial hardship and, in many cases, poverty (Ismail, 1997, pp. 73-74). Over time, the *Bank Priyayi* underwent several name changes reflecting shifting political authorities. It was later known as *Bank Rakyat*, and after being taken over by the Dutch Colonial Government in 1934, it was renamed *Algemeen Volkscredietbank (AVB)*. During the Japanese occupation (1942-1945), it operated under the name *Syomin Ginko*. Following its nationalization by the Government of the Republic of Indonesia in 1946, the institution was officially renamed *Bank Rakyat Indonesia (BRI)*, the name under which it continues to operate today (Citra Nur Hikmah, 2020).

c. The Kiai Penghulu of Banyumas and *Majalah Damai*

The rapid expansion of the press in the early twentieth-century Netherlands Indies coincided with the emergence of diverse social and political movements, including nationalist, socialist, Islamic, and labor organizations. Newspapers became an indispensable instrument for these movements, serving not merely as channels for disseminating information but also as platforms for mobilizing public opinion, articulating political aspirations, and fostering collective identities (Subuki & et.al, 2024). In this respect, the colonial press functioned as a new public sphere through which indigenous intellectuals and activists negotiated ideas of modernity, nationalism, and social reform.

Within the sphere of Islamic organizations, the press assumed an even more strategic role by functioning simultaneously as a medium of da'wah and a site for the construction and contestation of religious authority. Rather than relying exclusively on the traditional transmission of Islamic knowledge through *pesantren* and established networks of ulama, reformist Muslim groups increasingly utilized newspapers and periodicals to disseminate religious interpretations and engage broader Muslim audiences. This development marked a significant transformation in the configuration of religious authority in the Netherlands Indies. Whereas religious legitimacy had previously been dominated by traditionalist scholars, the rise of modernist Islamic movements introduced a more pluralistic landscape in which print media became a primary vehicle for legitimizing religious discourse and advancing reformist agendas (J. Burhanudin, 1970; Adam & Tamam, 2025). Consequently, the Islamic press should be understood not merely as an organizational communication tool but as a crucial arena for negotiating religious legitimacy, shaping public religious discourse, and redefining Islamic authority within the colonial context.

Like other organisations, PPDP is also active in publishing the official press release as a platform for expressing the organisation's views. Following the establishment of PPDP in May 1937, its administrators promptly formulated organizational agendas and work programs. One of the key initiatives subsequently undertaken was the publication of a magazine. Consequently, in January 1938, *Majalah Damai* was first issued. As stated in the *Muqaddimatun* of its inaugural edition, the editorial board declared that *Majalah Damai* functioned as the official magazine (*Madjallah Rasmijah*) of P.P.D.P." (Hoofdbestuur P.P.D.P., 1938). This official magazine of PPDP bore the full title "*Damai: Moeat Soearanja Perhimpoeanan Panghoeloe dan Pegawainja (P.P.D.P.) di Java dan Madoera dan Moeat Kepentingan Agama Islam.*" Within its editorial structure, the position of *Radaktur* (editor-in-chief) was held by R. Soemodihardjo, the Penghulu of Solo, while the role of *Beschermeheer* (patron) was occupied by K.R.P. Tapsiranom, the Penghulu Ageng of the Kasunanan Surakarta. The magazine was published on a monthly basis.

Majalah Damai published a wide range of reports, particularly concerning the activities of the central board of PPDP and its regional branches, as well as contemporary national and global issues. In addition to such coverage, the magazine featured opinion pieces and question-and-answer columns from its readers, most of whom were *penghulu*, including contributors from Banyumas. One of the kiai penghulu who actively contributed opinion articles to *Majalah Damai* was R. Moh. Kasim Poerwodarmodjo, who served as the PPDP Regional Consul for Banyumas (see Figure 1).

Out of sixteen issues of *Majalah Damai* published between January 1938 and April 1939, two titles authored by R. Moh. Kasim Poerwodarmodjo were recorded. These two works appeared across four separate issues, each presented in two installments. The first article, entitled "*Penjiaran Agama Islam dalam Lingkoengan Peratoeran Negeri,*" was originally a speech delivered by R. Moh. Kasim Poerwodarmodjo at a public meeting held at Societeit Habipraja on 7 August 1938, as part of the first anniversary commemoration of PPDP in Solo. This speech was

published in two parts: the first installment appeared in *Majalah Damai* No. 8-9, Year 1 (August-September 1938), (Moh. Kasim Poerwodarmodjo, 1938b), and the second in No. 10, Year 1 (October 1938). (Moh. Kasim Poerwodarmodjo, 1938c) His second article, titled "*Kenang-Kenangan Pergoeroean PPDP,*" bearing the motto "*Rakjat Bersemangat Hidoep Haroes Memikirkan Keadaan di Kemoedian Hari,*" was likewise published in two installments, namely in *Majalah Damai* No. 12, Year 1 (December 1938) (Moh. Kasim Poerwodarmodjo, 1938a), and No. 2, Year 2 (January 1939) (Moh. Kasim Poerwodarmodjo, 1939).



Figure I. R. Moh. Kasim Poerwodirdjo, Consul of PPDP for the Banyumas Region
(Source: *Damai*, Year 1, No. 3, 1938)

In addition to contributing opinion articles to *Majalah Damai*, the kiai penghulu of Banyumas were also active participants in the Islamic legal question-and-answer column. The magazine designated this column as "*Oetloeboel' Ilma: Penjoeloeh oemoem dari roepa-roepa masalah diniah jang bersangkoetan dengan hoekoem Sjar'ie d.l.l.s.*" From the sixteen issues examined by the researcher, several inquiries were identified as having been submitted by penghulu from the Banyumas region. For instance, in *Damai*, No. 2, Year 1 (February 1938), a penghulu from Purwokerto addressed the Editorial Board with the following question: "How should a Penghulu (Naib) issue a *verklaring* requested by adherents of another religion for a Muslim woman who intends to marry a non-Muslim man, so that we are not implicated in sin and do not violate state law?" This inquiry from the Purwokerto reader was subsequently answered by the editorial team of *Majalah Damai* as follows:

"Pengholoe Naib jang teroetama hanja berkewadjiban meloeloe mendjalankan perkawinan (nikah) dan pertjeraan (pegat) enz. Menoeroet Sjara' Agama Islam sadja. Dari itoe djikalau membikin verklaring seperti jang dimaksoedkan di atas tjoekeolah kiranja begini sadja.

Verklaring

Jang bertandatangan di bawah ini.....Penghoeloe (Naib) di.... menerangkan soedah memeriksa seorang perempoean bernama..... beroemah di.....

onderdistrict.... district..... regentschap.....keterangannja ia ta' berlaki (legan Jv.) hal mana tidak ada halangannja ia akan berkawin menoeroet agama Islam

Tanda tangan jang memberi

Verklaring"

..... ("Bahagian Soeal-Djawab: P4," 1938)

(The Penghulu Naib is principally obligated only to carry out marriages (*nikah*) and divorces (*pegat*), etc., in accordance solely with the prescriptions of Islamic law. Therefore, if issuing a *verklaring* as referred to above, it would suffice to formulate it in the following manner."

Verklaring

The undersigned, *Penghoeloe (Naib)* of, hereby declares that he has examined a woman named residing at sub-district district regency, and that according to her statement, she is unmarried (*legan, Jv.*), and that there exists no impediment to her entering into marriage in accordance with Islamic law.

Signature of the issuing authority,

verklaring

.....")

Another question was submitted by a penghulu from Purbalingga. This inquiry was recorded in *Majalah Damai*, No. 1, Year 2 (January 1939), and read as follows: "Who is the guardian (*wali*) of a Muslim woman whose father is still alive but professes Christianity, while her other relatives are Muslims?" This question from the Purbalingga penghulu was answered by the Editorial Board of *Majalah Damai* as follows:

"Terseboet dalam kitab Badjoeri djoez II moeka 111 fatsal Wali: Inna al-walijja jamna' al-wilajahwa janqaluha li al-Ab'ad. Maksoednja: bahwa seseorang jang boekan Islam ta' boleh mendjadi walinja seorang perempoean Islam, dan walinja haroes pindah pada wali jang lebih djaoeh (Wali Ab'ad)." ("Bahagian Soeal-Djawab: Pertanyaan 18," 1939)

(It is stated in *Kitab Badjoeri*, Volume II, page 111, in the chapter on guardianship (*Wali*): *"Inna al-waliyya yamna' al-wilayah wa yanqaluhā li al-ab'ad."* This means that a non-Muslim is not permitted to serve as the guardian (*wali*) of a Muslim woman, and that guardianship must therefore be transferred to a more distant eligible guardian (*wali ab'ad*)).

The active participation of the penghulu in the intellectual debates published in *Majalah Damai* indicates that the tradition of literacy in the Banyumas region experienced significant growth toward the end of the colonial period. This development suggests that such increasing literacy was supported by a progressively established and improved educational infrastructure, particularly for religious elites such as the kiai penghulu. Whereas previously they had generally received only non-formal education through pesantren and madrasah institutions, by the late nineteenth century—when the office of penghulu was incorporated into the colonial bureaucratic structure—they were required to possess proficiency in

Malay/Indonesian and literacy in the Latin script. Indeed, a regulation issued in 1894 stipulated that candidates applying for the position of penghulu had to submit their curriculum vitae in three scripts: Arabic, Latin, and Javanese. Consequently, by the twentieth century, in addition to their non-formal religious education, some prospective penghulu also attended courses in the Malay language and Latin script (Pijper, 1985).

Conclusion

At the turn of the nineteenth to the twentieth century, Banyumas experienced significant transformations as a result of deepening colonial penetration. Politically, the region came under the direct authority of the colonial government after its separation from the Kasunanan Surakarta in the aftermath of the Perang Jawa. This political shift profoundly affected the socio-religious structure of the region. Religious authority was no longer concentrated in a single elite group but became fragmented into several categories in response to changing historical circumstances. In Banyumas, the religious elite may be classified into four groups: *kiai tarekat*, *kiai kitab*, *kiai jimat*, and *kiai pejabat*. Among these, the *kiai pejabat*, or *kiai penghulu*, occupied a particularly distinctive position, situated between religious traditionalism and the administrative modernity of the colonial bureaucracy. This intermediary status enabled them to assume a strategic role within Banyumas society during this transitional period.

The *kiai penghulu* of Banyumas played a significant role in the region during the colonial period, with contributions spanning the socio-religious, socio-cultural, and socio-economic spheres. In the socio-religious domain, they emerged as key figures in the establishment of Islamic social movements that flourished in the first half of the twentieth century. In Banyumas, several *kiai penghulu* were actively involved in the founding and development of reformist organizations such as Muhammadiyah. Equally important was their contribution to the socio-cultural sphere, particularly through the dissemination of religious ideas and reformist thought aimed at enlightening the Muslim community. This intellectual engagement is reflected in their writings published in *Majalah Damai*, the official magazine of PPDP, where figures such as R. Moh. Kasim Poerwodirdjo, Consul of PPDP for the Banyumas Region, articulated their views. In the socio-economic field, their role is clearly demonstrated in the establishment of the Bank Priyayi Purwokerto (*De Poerwokertosche Hulp-en Spaarbank der Inlandsche Hoofden*), founded on 16 December 1895 using funds from the *Jami' Mosque of Purwokerto*. The bank was created as a financial solution for the local community, particularly the priyayi, to prevent their entanglement in debt to moneylenders. Taken together, these multifaceted engagements underline the strategic position of the *kiai penghulu* in Banyumas, a position made possible by their dual access to traditional Islamic scholarship and the modern administrative structures of the colonial bureaucracy.

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