

Pesantren in Indonesia and Their Role in the Colonial Period

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Abstract

In Indonesia, Islamic education is still mostly provided through pesantren, or Islamic training institutions. They have a close relationship with tarekat, as they have been successful in maintaining Islam as a personal and compassionate faith rather than a cold and formal doctrine. Pesantrens changed throughout the colonial era from being a largely educational institution to a political organization that backed the independence fight. This article's objective is to look at how pesantren changed from being just educational institutions to considerably assisting in the fight for liberation, as well as how they contributed to the battle against Dutch colonialism. Using academic writing on pesantren that examines their position throughout the colonial era, the content in this piece was found through library research. This article makes the case that Java's colonial-era social, cultural, and political protest groups benefited greatly from the pesantren system. It also seeks to explain their founding, objectives, student demographics, and involvement during this time period.

Keywords: pesantren, Islamic education, colonial era, protest movement.

Di Indonesia, pendidikan Islam sebagian besar masih diberikan melalui pesantren, atau lembaga pendidikan Islam. Mereka memiliki hubungan yang erat dengan tarekat, karena mereka telah berhasil mempertahankan Islam sebagai keyakinan yang bersifat personal dan welas asih, bukan sebagai doktrin yang dingin dan formal. Pesantren berubah selama era penjajahan kolonial dari sekedar lembaga pendidikan menjadi organisasi politik yang mendukung perjuangan kemerdekaan. Artikel ini bertujuan untuk melihat bagaimana pesantren berubah dari sekedar lembaga pendidikan menjadi lembaga yang berjuang untuk kemerdekaan, serta bagaimana mereka berkontribusi dalam perjuangan melawan penjajahan Belanda. Dengan menggunakan tulisan akademis tentang pesantren yang menelaah posisi mereka sepanjang era kolonial, isi tulisan ini dibuat melalui studi kepustakaan. Artikel ini menyatakan bahwa kelompok protes sosial, budaya, dan politik era kolonial di Jawa mendapat manfaat besar dari sistem pesantren. Hal ini juga menjelaskan asal usul, tujuan, demografi santrifuj, dan keterlibatan mereka selama periode waktu ini.

Kata Kunci: pesantren, pendidikan Islam, era kolonial, gerakan protes.

Introduction

The history of Indonesia shows that Islam played a crucial role in the country's development in terms of education, social, cultural, and political aspects. This is reflected by the emergence of several Islamic organizations in the 1900s, such as the modernist Sarekat Islam,¹ Muhammadiyah,² Persatuan Islam,³ and the traditionalist organization of Nahdhatul Ulama,⁴ which were composed of educated individuals who had studied Islam. These organizations initially focused on education but later expanded their roles to include political movements to achieve national independence. In terms of Islamic education, *pesantren*, or Islamic training centers, are considered the traditional form of Islamic education in Indonesia. Dhofier (1999) notes that *pesantren* had already served as centers of Islamic study in the early 16th century, according to classical Javanese sources.⁵

In this article, I argue that *pesantren* as institutions of the religious educational system, made an essential contribution in Indonesian education, and that the *pesantren* system played a significant role in the social, cultural, and political protest movements in Java during the colonial period. Therefore, this work attempts to describe the founding and aims of *pesantren* educational system, the types of pupils they attracted, and the role of these institutions in Java during the colonial period.

The Origin and Objective of Pesantren in Java

Azra et al. (2007) describe a *pesantren* as a residential school that focuses on the study of classical Islamic sciences, such as the Qur'an, hadith, and fiqh. This type of school is considered modern because it requires a permanent location and a structured educational

¹ Latiful Khuluq, "Sarekat Islam: Its Rise, Peak and Fall," *AlJami'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies* 35, no. 60 (1997): 246-72; Yasmis Yasmis, "Sarikat Islam Dalam Pergerakan Nasional Indonesia (1912-1927)," *Jurnal Sejarah Lontar* 6, no. 1 (2009): 21-31.

² On Muhammadiyah see James L. Peacock, *Purifying the Faith: The Muhammadiyah Movement in Indonesian Islam* (California: Benjamin-Cummings Publishing Company, 1978); Alfian, "Islamic Modernism in Indonesian Politics: The Muhammadiyah Movement during the Dutch Colonial Period (1912-1942)" (PhD Thesis, Madison, The University of Wisconsin Madison, 1969); Muhammad As'ad, "The Muhammadiyah Criticism against Mawlid Tradition over Centuries," *Journal of Indonesian Islam* 13, no. 2 (2019): 350-72.

³ See Howard Federspiel, *Islam and Ideology in the Emerging Indonesian State: The Persatuan Islam (Persis), 1923 to 1957* (Leiden: Brill, 2001).

⁴ See among others A. Farichin Chumaidy, "The Jam'iyah Nahdlatul'Ulama: Its Rise and Early Development, 1926-1945" (MA Thesis, McGill, McGill University, 1976); Choirul Anam, *Pertumbuhan Dan Perkembangan NU* (Solo: Jatayu, 1985); Suaidi Asyari, "The Role of Muslim Groups in Contemporary Indonesian Nationalism: A Study of the Nahdlatul Ulama Under the New Order, 1980s-1990s" (MA Thesis, McGill, McGill University, 1999); Ismail Fajrie Alatas, Muhammad As' ad, and Fathurrochman Karyadi, "Sejarah Hubungan Habaib Dan Nahdlatul Ulama (NU)," *Tebuireng: Journal of Islamic Studies and Society* 2, no. 2 (2022): 87-101, <https://doi.org/10.33752/tjiss.v2i2.2388>.

⁵ Zamakhsyari Dhofier, *The Pesantren Tradition: The Role of the Kyai in the Maintenance of Traditional Islam in Java*, Monograph Series Press, Program for Southeast Asian Studies (Tempe, Arizona: Program for Southeast Asia Studies, Arizona State University, 1999), 14.

system with specific curricula, teaching tools, and goals.⁶ The first pesantren is unknown, but it is believed that the Pesantren Tegalsari in Java was established in 1742.⁷ The Kitab Kuning, a collection of Arabic books used as reference in pesantren education, was also used before the 18th century.⁸ In the beginning, pesantrens were small and found mainly in coastal areas where Islam was first introduced, but they were not as organized as modern education systems.⁹

Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia have historically been known by a number of different names. The term pesantren was well known in Java and Kalimantan, and similar educational institutions called pondok were found in Kalimantan, South Sulawesi, Malaysia, and a part of Sumatra.¹⁰ The surau was found in West Sumatra, and the dayah was found in Aceh. But, Dhofier (1999) notes that the term pondok was used in Java as well as Madura. Pondok literally means “bamboo hut,” and the word may have originated from the term for dormitories where students lived or from the Arabic term for hotel or dormitory (*funduk*).¹¹ All of the meanings of pondok refer to one of the five elements of the pesantren educational system, which is to provide a complex of houses for students to live in while they engage in their studies. The other elements that identify pesantren educational institutions are the presence of a kiai, who serves as the leader of the pesantran, the mosque associated with the educational facility, the kitab kuning as a textbook used in pesantren which provides a specific curriculum, and finally the santri or the students who attend the pesantran.¹²

Sunni Muslims were significant in the establishment of pesantren or pondok in Indonesia.¹³ There was a strong Sunni Muslim presence in Southeast Asia from the 17th to the second half of the 19th centuries. Many Malay-Indonesian students studied in Mecca and Medina for several years, and upon returning, became ulama who then spread Middle Eastern Islamic beliefs to their students in the Malay-Indonesian world. The

⁶ Azyumardi Azra, Dina Afrianty, and Robert W. Hefner, “Pesantren and Madrasa: Muslim Schools and National Ideals in Indonesia,” in *Schooling Islam: The Culture and Politics of Modern Muslim Education*, ed. Robert W. Hefner and Muhammad Qasim Zaman (the United Kingdom: Princeton University Press, 2007), 175.

⁷ Martin van Bruinessen, “Pesantren and Kitab Kuning: Maintenance and Continuation of a Tradition of Religious Learning,” in *Texts from the Islands: Oral and Written Traditions of Indonesia and the Malay World*, ed. Wolfgang Marschall (Berne: University of Berne, 1994), 32.

⁸ *Kitab kuning* (english means yellow books) is arabic text used by teachers at pondok pesantren to teach students. More reading about this topic see Martin Van Bruinessen, “Kitab Kuning: Books in Arabic Script Used in the Pesantren Milieu: Comments on a New Collection in the KITLV Library,” *Bijdragen Tot de Taal, Land-En Volkenkunde* 146, no. 2/3 (1990): 226-69; Martin Van Bruinessen, *Kitab Kuning, Pesantren, Dan Tarekat* (Yogyakarta: Gading Publishing, 1999).

⁹ Azra, Afrianty, and Hefner, “Pesantren and Madrasa,” 174.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Dhofier, *The Pesantren Tradition*, 2.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Azyumardi Azra, “Islamic Thought: Theory, Concepts and Doctrines in the Context of Southeast Asian Islam,” in *Islam in Southeast Asia, Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies*, ed. K.S. Nathen and Mohammad Hashim Kamali (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2005).

ulama had cosmopolitan networks centered in Mecca and Medina, but also extended to Africa, South Asia, Central Asia, and Southeast Asia.¹⁴

In the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries, a number of well-known students were part of ulama networks and they contributed some of the earliest works in Malay and Arabic that pertained to various fields of Islamic knowledge. These works were significant as they were used as references in pesantrens. For example, al-Raniri was the first writer to produce a work called *al-Sirat al-Mustaqim* on *fiqh ibadah* (rituals), which is still in use today.¹⁵

Sunni Muslims follow *ahl al-sunnah wa'l jama'ah*, which means “the followers of the Prophet's tradition and the consensus of the ulama”.¹⁶ There are three important elements of Sunni tradition: Ash'arite theology, the Shafi'ite School of Law, and Ghazalian Sufism.¹⁷ As a result, pesantren, or Islamic boarding schools, are often associated with the traditionalist school, which is distinct from Islamic modernism. The modernist school was influenced by a reform movement led by Jamal ad-Din al-Afghani, Muhammad Rashid Rida, and Muhammad Abduh in the 19th century.¹⁸ This movement aimed to purify Islam by removing illegal innovations, or *bid'a*, and returning to the original sources of Islam: the Qur'an and the Hadith, or the Prophet's traditions. The modernists rejected the authority of “the four medieval schools of law”. One reason that pesantren are considered “traditionalist” institutions is that their curriculum traditionally focused on teaching classical Islamic traditions until the early 20th century. Therefore, the goals of the pesantren system were to transmit religious knowledge, preserve the Islamic tradition, and serve as a center for the education and social reproduction of the ulama.¹⁹

There are three proposed explanations for the development of the pesantren system in Java, according to Abdurrahman Mas'ud.²⁰ The first explanation involves the Walisongo, a group of nine saints who helped spread Islam in Java from the 15th to the 16th century. These saints included Maulana Malik Ibrahim, Sunan Ampel, Sunan Bonang, Sunan Kalijaga, Sunan Drajat, Sunan Giri, Sunan Kudus, Sunan Muria, and Sunan Gunungjati. Maulana Malik Ibrahim is considered the “spiritual father” of the group. The establishment of the Malay trading state of Malacca in the early 15th century also contributed to the spread of Islam in Indonesia, as it was a major trading hub and

¹⁴ Ibid., 10.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Dhofier, *The Pesantren Tradition*, 2.

¹⁷ Azyumardi Azra, “Islamic Thought: Theory, Concepts and Doctrines in the Context of Southeast Asian Islam,”.

¹⁸ Hisham Sharabi, *Arab Intellectuals and the West: The Formative Years, 1875-1914* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1970), 24.

¹⁹ Azra, Afrianty, and Hefner, “Pesantren and Madrasa.”

²⁰ Abdurrahman Mas'ud, *Dari Haramain Ke Nusantara: Jejak Intelektual Arsitek Pesantren* (Jakarta: Kencana Media Group, 2006).

strategic strait.²¹ Muslim traders established communities in several coastal areas of Java, and Maulana Malik Ibrahim founded a community in Gresik, which is now a town in East Java. He had his pupils work during the day and attend pengajian, or Qur'an recitation, at night.²²

The second factor that contributed to the development of the pesantren system is the journey to Mecca for both pilgrimage and study. It was in the late 18th or early 19th century that a community of pilgrims and students traveled to Mecca and Medina to gain advanced knowledge about Islam. Upon their return, some of them established pesantren²³ and wrote books that were later used as textbooks in pesantren throughout Indonesia.²⁴ This connection also influenced the study of al-Ghazali's Sufism and the use of Mecca orders as a reference and teaching guide in the pesantren educational system.²⁵ As educated Muslims showed increasing progress, the colonial government began to closely monitor pilgrims returning from Mecca and Medina and sent C. Snouck Hurgonje, a scholar of Islam, to Arabia.²⁶ The Dutch response to Javanese going on pilgrimage to Mecca likely stemmed from their experience with the Paderi in Minangkabau in the 1820s and 1830s. Minangkabau leaders had established an education system immediately after returning from Mecca around 1804. Furthermore, some rebellions in Indonesia were led by hadji, the title given to those who had completed the pilgrimage. As a result, the Dutch attempted to control the pilgrimage process by imposing restrictive policies on who could travel. For instance, they began charging a fee for pilgrimage travel permits for Javanese pilgrims in 1825.²⁷

The third link between the establishment of pesantren and the colonial government was the implementation of a policy of dual education. This policy allowed Western, Chinese, and nobly-born Indonesian children to study, but restricted indigenous members of society from attending these educational institutions.²⁸ For example, the ELS Europese Lagere School (ELS) and the Holand Chinese School (HCS) were established for the children of Dutch and Chinese residents in the colonial Indies. The curriculum was similar to that of a native school, with additional courses in Dutch and French. Only those from a noble class were allowed to study at the Hollands Inlandse

²¹ M.C. Ricklefs, *History of Modern Indonesia since c. 1300* (London: The Macmillan Press LTD, 1993), 5.

²² KH. Saifuddin Zuhri, *Sejarah Kebangkitan Islam Dan Perkembangannya Di Indonesia* (Bandung: Al-Ma'arif, 1979), 263.

²³ Bruinessen, "Pesantren and Kitab Kuning," 19.

²⁴ Azyumardi Azra, "Islamic Thought: Theory, Concepts and Doctrines in the Context of Southeast Asian Islam," in *Islam in Southeast Asia, Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies*, ed. K.S. Nathen and Mohammad Hashim Kamali (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2005), 10.

²⁵ Deliar Noer, *Modernist Muslim Movements in Indonesia* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1973), 28.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 26.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 25.

²⁸ Achmad Zaini, *Kyai Haji Abdul Wahid Hasyim: His Contribution to Muslim Educational Reform and Indonesian Nationalism during the Twentieth Century* (Yogyakarta: Titian Ilahi Press, 1998), 48.

School (HIS) established in 1914.²⁹ The colonial government also adopted Western curriculum and teaching methods without considering the needs of local students. In response, many Javanese Muslims sent their children to pesantren as a form of protest and because it was the only alternative for education.³⁰

Pesantren institutions distinguished themselves from the colonial Dutch and saw it as a “mental and cultural defense” against the colonial government.³¹ Indonesian Muslims, particularly those living in the countryside, were prohibited by traditionalist ulama from dressing in Dutch-style clothing, behaving like the Dutch, or studying their language. However, not all individuals involved in the pesantren system followed this approach. Wahid Hasyim, one of the leaders of Nahdhatul Ulama, decided to remain independent by choosing a method opposite from other ulama. He wore Dutch-style clothing and learned Dutch, as well as taught this language, along with English, to his santri (students) at Tebuireng between 1936 and 1938.³² Wahid Hasyim even attempted to enhance the human resources for Muslim santri by adjusting useful elements of the colonial system to the pesantren institution.

In the following section, I will discuss the santri, or the pupils of pesantren, in the colonial period, including what they studied and how Kiai, the leaders, owners, and religious experts of pesantren, were involved in this process. The development and education provided by pesantren is largely determined by the Kiai, which is one of the characteristics that sets pesantren apart from other institutions.

The Types of Pupils of Pesantren

One important element of the pesantren system is the pupils, known as santri or thalib al-‘ilm, which means “seekers of knowledge”.³³ According to C.C. Berg (1932), the term santri comes from the Indian word shastri, which means “the man who knows the Hindu holy books”.³⁴ However, Dhofier (1999) argues that the information on how this term is used in the context of pesantren is insufficient and that it is more appropriate to use *thalib* and *mudarrasun*, terms commonly used in the Middle East to refer to students of pesantren.³⁵

In Javanese society, there were two categories of Muslims based on their worship and membership practices: Abangan and Muslimin. Abangan, literally meaning “the brown or red ones,” refers to Muslims who follow Islam but also believe in mysticism as

²⁹ Ibid., 47.

³⁰ Ibid., 49.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid., 76.

³³ Zamakhsyari Dhofier, *The Pesantren Tradition: The Role of the Kyai in the Maintenance of Traditional Islam in Java*, 8.

³⁴ C.C. Berg, “Indonesia,” in *Whither Islam? A Survey of Modern Movement in the Moslem World*, ed. H.A.R. Gibb (London: V. GGolancz, 1932), 257.

³⁵ Zamakhsyari Dhofier, *The Pesantren Tradition: The Role of the Kyai in the Maintenance of Traditional Islam in Java*, 8.

part of their religious belief system. Islamic ritual practices such as the five daily prayers and fasting are not strongly followed, but Javanese cultural elements like the shadow puppet theater known as wayang remain important.³⁶ Muslimin, on the other hand, are those who practice Islam in its entirety and use Islamic obligations as the rules for their daily life. Muslimin are often called putihan, or “the white ones,” and santri as students of pesantren.³⁷ As a result, they have a deeper understanding of Islam than those who practice the Abangan form of Islam.

Muslimin were divided between urban and rural areas. Urban Muslimin, who represented modernist Islam, typically lived in the Javanese town of Kauman, near a large mosque. In the early 20th century, urban Muslims began to embrace notions of progressiveness and made efforts to change society. The Sarekat Dagang Islamiyah, or Islamic Commercial Union, founded in 1909 by Tirtoadisurjo, is an example of this movement. It was established to support Indonesian traders.³⁸ In contrast, rural Muslimin tended to represent a more traditionalist version of Islam. According to Dhofier (1999), the center of Islamic scholarly studies was moved to the villages where pesantren settlements existed and was developed by the Kiais, as Islam could not play a significant role in the political struggle in Javanese cities due to Dutch opposition and restrictions.³⁹

In terms of economic background, the pupils at pesantren typically came from the lower and middle classes. Because some pesantren did not charge for their educational services, some children from poor families preferred to help their parents work in the fields instead of attending school. Therefore, many pupils at pesantren came from wealthy families and this is part of the reason why those most influenced by santri culture, such as the Kiai and Haji, were members of wealthy families.⁴⁰ Some pupils from the middle class chose to leave their homes and study at well-known pesantren, while those from the upper classes often went to Mecca to pursue their studies.

Dhofier (1999) mentions there were three reasons why santri would leave their homes to attend a pesantren. Firstly, they sought advanced knowledge of Islam that was not available at pesantren near their homes. Secondly, they wanted to become santri at a well-known pesantren, which may have been located in a different village or district. Thirdly, by leaving their homes, they hoped to be free from family obligations and be able to focus more on achieving their goal of becoming Islamic scholars.⁴¹ However, in order to accomplish these goals, santri needed to have the financial means to support their travel and living costs at the pesantren. Therefore, in the past, leaving home for education at a pesantren was a privilege because of the financial aspects involved. Additionally,

³⁶ Ricklefs, *History of Modern Indonesia since c. 1300*, 164.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 166.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Zamakhsyari Dhofier, *The Pesantren Tradition: The Role of the Kyai in the Maintenance of Traditional Islam in Java*, xxix.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 33.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 31

people expected more from santri in terms of being Islamic experts and being able to answer religious questions.

For those who came from outside villages, pesantren provided housing where santri lived during their period of study under the instruction of a Kiai. These students were called santri mukim.⁴² They lived in housing complexes which were typically located near the Kiai's house, the mosque, and the classrooms. The complexes were surrounded by high walls to prevent santri from leaving without the Kiai's permission. Accommodations were separated between male and female students starting in the early 1900s. The first pesantren to provide housing for female pupils was Pesantren Denanyar in Jombang, established in 1917. Before that time, female students could only receive education through pengajian (Qur'anic school).⁴³ The Kiai controlled the activities of santri attending pesantren, which started in the early morning and continued until night time. However, there were also santri kalong who did not live in the pesantren complex because they lived in the same village as the pesantren. Santri kalong attended the pesantren only for classes and then returned home.⁴⁴

During the colonial period, there were two educational systems where santri studied about Islam: pengajian Qur'an (Qur'anic school) and pondok pesantren (boarding school). Pengajian was typically organized at mosques or prayer places in villages known as langgars. It was conducted by an ulama or ustadz, or at home as part of a family's daily activities. This practice represented a primary level of Muslim education in the Dutch East Indies for learning to read the Qur'an in Arabic (Zaini, 1998: 39).⁴⁵ Saifuddin Zuhri (1977) wrote about an example of pengajian in his autobiography:

“But, my *madrasah*, Madrasah al-Huda only occupied a *langgar* belonging to Mbah Haji Abdul Fattah. The size was 9 x 12 meters, slightly pushing out into the highway. As a *langgar*, of course, it served as *mushalla*, a place of prayer, sometimes it was a place for the children learning *turutan* (the last nine pages of the Qur'an) and the al-Qur'an.”⁴⁶

The age of children who engaged in this level of instruction was typically around five years old. They typically began learning the Qur'an at home under the instruction of their parents. They memorized short chapters of the Qur'an using the last nine pages of the Qur'an as a textbook. When the children reached seven or eight years old, they were taught the Arabic alphabet. Besides reading the Qur'an, children also learned tajwid, the science of reciting the Qur'an, as well as an introduction to Islamic teachings related to religious duties such as ablution and prayer. In terms of Islamic knowledge, it was

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Achmad Zaini, *Kyai Haji Abdul Wahid Hasyim...*, 39.

⁴⁶ KH. Saifuddin Zuhri, *Guruku Orang-Orang Dari Pesantren* (Bandung: Al-Ma'arif, 1977), 19.

important for children to learn how to articulate the shahada, the declaration of faith, in order to declare their belief as Muslims. Regularly pronouncing this phrase is an important part of prayer for Muslims. Some parents with sufficient Islamic knowledge taught their children themselves in order to advance their basic knowledge before sending them to the langgar, or small village mosque, for more advanced instruction in Islamic practice and theory.

Dhofier (1999) explains that most pesantrens originated from pengajian, a process in which the santri community struggled to maintain themselves and grow in size and development. However, some incipient pesantrens may have disappeared if there was no subsequent leader after the main kiai (Islamic scholar) passed away. Pesantren Cempaka in Surabaya, Pesantren Maskumambang in Gresik, Pesantren Jamsaren in Surakarta, and Pesantren Kademangan in Bangkalan Madura are examples of pesantrens that became pengajian because of the lack of appropriate guidance from a recognized Islamic scholar.⁴⁷

In terms of the subjects taught to santri, pesantrens differed from pengajian. Pesantrens provided advanced Islamic knowledge in several subjects, divided into eight classifications: Arabic grammar (*ilmu alat*) containing syntax (*nahwu*) and morphology (*sarf*), Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*), the root of Islamic jurisprudence (*usul fiqh*), the prophet's tradition (*hadith*), Qur'anic exegesis (*tafsir*), Islamic theology (*tauhid*), mysticism (*tasawuf*), and ethics, miscellaneous texts on the history of Islam (*tarikh*), and rhetoric (*balaghah*).⁴⁸ These subjects were found in the *Kitab Kuning* (yellow scriptures), which were commonly used as textbooks in pesantrens.

According to Dhofier, there were two main methodologies used in pesantren education: *sorogan* and *bandongan*. *Sorogan* was a personal method in which each student would repeat passages from the Qur'an or other Arabic texts, such as the *Kitab Kuning*, correctly in front of the teacher. The teacher would only assist two or three students in each class in order to personally evaluate the quality of each student, and only advanced students were allowed to read, explain, and continue reading the passage beyond what they had repeated. In contrast, *bandongan* or *weton* teaching was a system in which a group of students (ranging from five to five hundred) listened to the teacher read and translate the Arabic text word by word using the Javanese language, and later explaining the meaning. Each student had their own *Kitab Kuning* to take notes from the teacher. "The class in which the *bandongan* system is used is called a *halaqah*".⁴⁹

In pesantren education, the kiai play an important role in developing and maintaining the education of the pupils. The term kiai refers to traditionalist ulama, or Islamic scholars, in Central and East Java. It has been said that pesantren are like small kingdoms, in which the kiai is like a king, who has significant power and influence. Although many Javanese kiai live in rural villages, they are considered to have high social

⁴⁷ Zamakhsyari Dhofier, *The Pesantren Tradition...*, 13.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 11

standing. They are typically landowners who teach and preach, and are influential decision makers in Javanese society. Kiai have a strong influence on the social system in Java, particularly in relation to issues of property, marriage, divorce, and inheritance. As Islamic religious law governs individual relations with both God and others, Javanese kiai hold a prominent position in the community. In terms of the relationship between santri, or Islamic students, and kiai, the Javanese pesantren have a concept called barokah, which means “blessing” or “reward” from God. Santri often attribute this term to God's reward for listening to the kiai's advice, although the kiai is not the one who bestows the blessing.

The term tarekat, which refers to the practical application of Sufism in pesantren, also plays an important role in the leadership of kiai among Muslim communities and in santri culture. Kiai hold themselves in high regard as leaders. According to Dhofier (1999), tarekat is defined as:

“A scrupulous observance of the rules of shari’ah in ritual and social matters by observing wira’i (refraining from everything that is uncertainly allowed by syari’ah), performing recommended ritual before and after obligatory prayers, and by practicing riyalah (derives from Arabic riyada, meaning religious exercises or devotions) also known as *tasawuf*, the inner and esoteric dimension of Islam”.⁵⁰

Historians of Islam in Java often note that tarekat orders were present in Java as early as the 16th or 17th century. The people who were attracted to join tarekat were typically older individuals who sought to strengthen their religious beliefs. Many of them were motivated by a desire to engage in dhikir, or the practice of remembering God, and to foster a sense of brotherhood among tarekat members. In dhikir gatherings, the kiai typically leads the ma’mum, or participants in communal prayers, in reciting selections from the Qur’an that contain the name of God.⁵¹

After discussing the various elements of pesantren education, such as the pupils, pondok, curricula, and kiai, and how they are interconnected, the next section will analyze the contribution of pesantren in Java during the colonial period. As mentioned previously, pesantren not only served as educational institutions, but also played a significant role in social, cultural, and political protest movements in Java during this time.

The Role of Pesantren in Java During the Colonial Period

Pesantren is considered a “traditionalist” institution because its curricula are composed of teaching in classical Islamic traditions of knowledge (Azra et al. 2007: 175).⁵² According

⁵⁰ Ibid., 137

⁵¹ Ibid., 99

⁵² Azyumardi Azra, Dina Afrianty, and Robert W. Hefner, “Pesantren and Madrasa..”, 175.

to Zaini,⁵³ the term “traditionalist” is often associated with negative attitudes such as anti-modernism and contra-reformist organizations. Geertz introduced the three categorizations of santri, abangan, and priyayi to Javanese society, depicting religious appearances of pesantren as “kuburan” and “ganjaran” (grave and gift) because some of the lessons and traditions in pesantren discuss life after death and achieving blessings from God.⁵⁴ However, the history of the establishment and development of pesantren shows that it is not a traditionalist institution in the negative sense described by Geertz. Pesantren does believe in life after death, but it also concerns itself with current life in the world.⁵⁵

During the colonial period, pesantren played a role in three aspects in Java. First, as the oldest education system in Indonesia, pesantren not only educated indigenous people about Islamic knowledge but also strengthened their cultural identity and nationalism. The root of the establishment of pesantren, pengajian, could build a santri milieu among Javanese from the lowest class in rural areas where Islam was considered by the great majority as their national identity.⁵⁶ Bumiputera and Dutch were in an opposite way. On the one hand, all bumiputera in Java (literally: “sons of the earth/island”) were called “wong selam” (Muslims), meaning that Islam was the synonym of nationality and to be a Muslim meant being a moslem. On the other hand, the West or the Dutch were identified with Christianity. Javanese people who sent their children to Dutch schools or Malay/Javanese schools established by the Dutch government were accused of leaving their children to be educated by foreigners to be converted to Christianity.⁵⁷

In addition, pesantren also influenced Javanese people socioeconomically. As mentioned by Dhofier (1999), the relationship between socioeconomic aspects and Islamic knowledge can be found in two ways. First, until the 1940s, the term “educated man” referred to people who were successful in Islamic education in pesantren. Until the 1920s, pesantren and pengajian were the only education accessible to people in the area. Ten years later, the Dutch offered four-year elementary schools for children aged eight to twelve, but these schools were closed after some time. As a result, teachers who had religious knowledge were highly regarded. Second, only people who were wealthy could send their children to “good” pesantren, and only people who were tremendously wealthy could send their children to study in Mecca.⁵⁸

In terms of educational reform, Wahid Hasyim, after returning from Mecca in 1933, reformed the method of teaching and the goal of study, and introduced Western subjects. The change in method allowed students to ask questions instead of being

⁵³ Zaini, *Kyai Haji Abdul Wahid Hasyim: His Contribution to Muslim Educational Reform and Indonesian Nationalism during the Twentieth Century*, 2.

⁵⁴ Clifford Geertz, *The Religion of Java* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), 236–38.

⁵⁵ Zamakhsyari Dhofier, *The Pesantren Tradition...*, xxii.

⁵⁶ Noer, *Modernist Muslim Movements in Indonesia*, 300.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Zamakhsyari Dhofier, *The Pesantren Tradition...*, 135.

passive. Previously, studying in pesantren was only for becoming ulama, but Wahid Hasyim introduced Islamic knowledge from books written in Latin script. This was against his father's wishes, but in 1935 Wahid Hasyim released his ideas by establishing Madrasah Nizamiyah. This reform enabled santri to compete with Dutch scholars for positions in society. He adopted a systematic tutorial method instead of the bandongan method.⁵⁹

The new system of madrasah helped kiai to consolidate their position in relation to extending Western schools. The number of major pesantren and their students increased more during the 1920s and 1930s. Before the 1920s, each major pesantren had about two or four hundred students, and in the early 1930s, there were many pesantren, such as Tebuireng, that had over 1,500 students. Additionally, high school education was still largely reserved for the European population until 1940.⁶⁰

Wahid Hasyim also established a library and provided about 1,000 titles of textbooks and works on popular sciences in various languages to increase reading habits and broaden the students' range of knowledge. He also subscribed to many magazines and newspapers, such as *Panji Mas* (Banner of Islam) and *Penjebar Semangat* (Spreader of Courage).⁶¹ These magazines were known as “black marked” magazines because of their content, which attracted readers to criticize the colonial government. Therefore, pesantren not only educated in Islamic knowledge, but also built nationalism in its pupils.

Second, from a cultural perspective, pesantren are seen as fortresses for the defense of the Islamic community and centers for the spread of the Islamic faith.⁶² As a social institution, pesantren became a battleground for Muslim identity and protected local culture from Western influence. To implement this idea, Kiai, as leaders, used fatwa for implementation. Noer wrote (1973): “It was common to hear a Kiai or a traditional Muslim teacher issue a fatwa (decision of religious character) that it was haram (unlawful, sinful) or at least un-Islamic to enter Dutch schools. Similar fatwa were issued regarding the matter of dress: local people who wore European clothes were regarded as imitating the Europeans (i.e. Christians) and were sometimes even considered kafir (disbelievers). Neckties, pants, and hats of European style were considered haram”.⁶³

In addition, as a social institution, pesantren used tarekat as a way to organize the masses and build unity. Pesantren has a close tradition with tarekat because, first, tarekat followed by kiai has offered clear benefits to Islam in Java in terms of ethics and practice. The personal examples of Sufi masters and the establishment of tarekat orders are the way Islam first spread in Java. Tarekat orders mobilize the masses at the grassroots level and have proven to keep Islam from “becoming a cold and formal doctrine, instead keeping it

⁵⁹ Achmad Zaini, *Kyai Haji Abdul Wahid Hasyim...*, 54-55.

⁶⁰ Zamakhsyari Dhofier, *The Pesantren Tradition...*, 19.

⁶¹ Achmad Zaini, *Kyai Haji Abdul Wahid Hasyim...*, 56.

⁶² Zamakhsyari Dhofier, *The Pesantren Tradition...*, xxiv.

⁶³ Deliar Noer, *Modernist Muslim Movements in Indonesia ...*, 8.

alive as an intimate and compassionate faith". Second, the scheduled meetings served the social needs of traditional people. Third, tarekat orders in Java offered a religious sphere for women, who have little recognition in the legal religious setup.⁶⁴

Third, politically, pesantrens have contributed to nation-building and the Muslim movement in gaining national independence. According to Ricklefs (1993), by 1927, a number of Indonesian leaders and a new sense of self emerged, and the greater self-awareness was related to religious and ideological lines. However, the Dutch repression against these emergences.⁶⁵ In addition, the establishment of pesantrens and their generation represented Muslim leadership in Java. Noer (1973) said that Muslim nationalism was a trigger for nationalism in Indonesia.⁶⁶ In the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, pesantrens played a political role in protest movements in rural Java. Politics became a part of pesantren life but was not regarded as a major interest.⁶⁷

In the 19th century, the movement demonstrated the purification of Islamic civilization and the liberation movement of Indonesian Muslims against the colonialists. For example, the Padri wars against the Dutch in West Sumatra in 1821-1837 and the Java wars of 1825-1830. The liberation spirit of the movement of "back to the Qur'an and the Sunna" attracted a large number of young and rigorous Muslims. In contrast, the Indonesian traditionalist ulama clearly disagreed with this Wahhabization of Islam. For them, the movement not only declined Islamic discourse but also forced its literalist and intolerant interpretation. In order to defend, they established the Nahdhatul Ulama in 1926, and Wahid Hasyim's father was the founder.⁶⁸ Besides Hasyim Asy'ari, Wahid Hasyim could also be an example of a leader emerging from the pesantren tradition.

Conclusion

Pesantren is the oldest education system in Indonesia, but it is not easy to determine when and by whom the first pesantren was established. However, since the 16th century, small pesantrens have been found in Java, particularly in coastal areas where Islam was first introduced. The three descriptions explain how the pesantren system developed in Java. The first explanation is that the root of the pesantren is related to the contribution of the Walisongo, or the nine saints who emerged in Islam in Java from the 15th to the 16th century. The second factor is the journey to Mecca for both pilgrimage and studying, and the third link between the establishment of pesantren and the colonial government was the implementation of a policy of dual education.

⁶⁴ Zamakhsyari Dhofier, *The Pesantren Tradition...*, 145.

⁶⁵ M.C. Ricklefs, *History of Modern Indonesia since c. 1300...*, 163.

⁶⁶ Deliar Noer, *Modernist Muslim Movements in Indonesia ...*, 7.

⁶⁷ Zamakhsyari Dhofier, *The Pesantren Tradition...*, 2.

⁶⁸ Yudian Wahyudi, "Was Wahid Hasyim Really Just A Traditionalist," in *Kyai Haji Abdul Wahid Hasyim: His Contribution to Muslim Educational Reform and Indonesian Nationalism during the Twentieth Century*, ed. Achmad Zaini (Yogyakarta: Titian Ilahi Press, 1998), xiv.

Modern pesantrens have five elements: pondok, mosque, santri, kiai, and kitab kuning. Santri who studied Islam in the pesantrens were from Islamic traditional communities, and they used to be from the lower and middle-class Javanese people. However, pupils who were from the middle class preferred to leave their home and study in well-known pesantrens, and those who were from the upper class used to go to Mecca. Some reasons for leaving home were to gain advanced Islamic knowledge that was not found in the pesantrens located near their home. Second, they wanted to be a santri in a famous pesantren that was well known, and third, by leaving their home, they expected to not be disturbed by family duties so that they could concentrate more. There are also two types of santri: santri mukim who reside in housing that is usually located in the same place as the Kiai's house, and santri kalong who come to the pesantren only for attending class and then return to their home.

During the colonial period, there were two educational systems where santri studied about Islam: pengajian al-Qur'an (Qur'anic school) and pondok pesantren (boarding school). Pengajian was normally organized at mosques and most pesantrens originally developed from pengajian. In pesantren education, kiai plays an important role in developing pesantren and maintaining the pupils. In regard to the relationship between santri and kiai, in Javanese pesantren there is a term barokah which means "blessing" or "reward" from Allah. Santri often used to formulate this term as "God's reward" given because of the kiai. However, kiai was not the actor who gave the blessing, but it is believed that God blessed the santri only if the santri believed in the kiai's advice and paid regards to the kiai. Tarekat, which referred to Sufism's practices in pesantren, also played an important role in the leadership of kiai among Muslim communities and santri culture as the contribution of pesantren in Java in the colonial period. As indicated before, pesantren played their roles not only in education, but also took significant responsibility in social, cultural, and political protest movements in Java during the colonial period.

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